

SHORT STORIES

A WEEKLY
MAGAZINE FOR HOME AND TRAIN

No. 621.

FOR WEEK ENDING NOVEMBER 24TH, 1900.

[ONE PENNY.]

Worry and Low Spirits.

It is astonishing to what an extent we are all liable to occasional ailments. A mental trouble, pecuniary care, or food eaten in the wrong manner or at irregular periods, or food in itself indigestible, may, and often does, give us an "attack of the blues," a Bilious disorder, a disagreeable fit of Indigestion, or a Sick headache. During these periods our energies and strength appear to wane away, so that we are loth to undertake the day's duties and find difficulty in summoning sufficient resolution to carry them out. Besides which our Nerves are disorganised, and minor troubles, otherwise accounted "trifles as light as air," at these untoward periods fret and fume us to a degree out of all proportion to their importance. Everything is indeed jaundiced to our view, so that we fear impending trouble, pecuniary losses—in other words, the black dog "Care" has us for his own, and we anticipate evils for ourselves that happily rarely come to pass.

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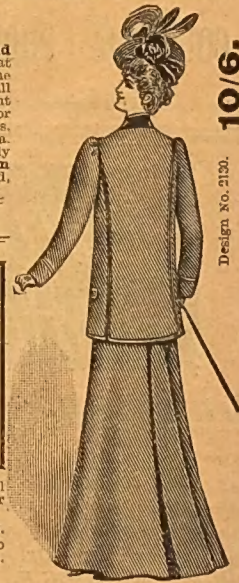
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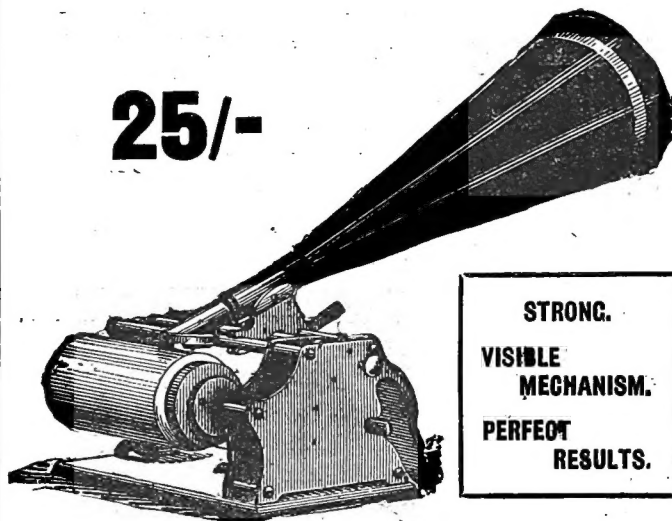
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SHORT

STORIES

No. 621.]

For the Week Ending Nov. 24th, 1900.

[ONE PENNY.]

THE FIRST SPEAR.

A Romance of the Indian Plains.

UNDER the grateful shade of a "tope" of grand old peepul trees was pitched the standing camp of Colonel Simkin, Cantonment magistrate of Broilempore, a station some ten miles off in the district of Oude.

The colonel was a genial, hospitable old "Shikaree," who took a delight in gathering about him a few sporting friends for a bout of pig-sticking in the neighbouring plains, or a week's big-game shooting in the Goruckpore Terai.

The site chosen for the camp was at once picturesque and advantageous, with a fine open country stretching around, admirably adapted for riding down the mighty boar, and plenty of jungle patches and sugar "Khets" near at hand, affording excellent covert and literally abounding with "pig."

The withering breath of an Indian summer had not yet parched the plains, and instead of that brown arid aspect which the face of nature would surely assume a few weeks hence, the surrounding country was still green and refreshing looking, its general flatness being relieved by the beautiful Nepaul Hills in the background.

Colonel Simkin himself, albeit now rather stiff in the saddle, was an enthusiastic pig-sticker and once a well-known member of the time honoured Nugger Hunt. Many a maddening race of "first spear" had he gone through in the Deccan, that great metropolis of hog hunting, and though this was several years ago, pleasant memories of those glorious meets beside the Grove of Arkola, of those dashing gallops over the sheet rocks and rolling stones of the Ghauts, came back vividly to his mind, the very perfume of the aromatic shrub peculiar to the Deccan hills seeming to arise round him and embalm those memories like some sweet incense of the past.

Amongst the colonel's guests (for such the hospitable
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old fellow made them in his "Dewan-Khana," or big dining tent) were a couple of sporting ensigns who had lately arrived from England, and who consequently came under the denomination of "griffs or griffins"—signifying neophytes in the manners and customs of Anglo-Indians.

These two youths were bosom friends; but alas, soon after their arrival at Broilempore, something, or rather somebody, suddenly came between them; the old story—a woman with whom both fell in love at the same moment. Now, as Claudio says:

Friendship is constant in all other things
Save in the office and affairs of love—

and the friendship between Ensign Spoonley and Ensign Mashwell was there and then converted into the fiercest rivalry.

The Siren who had thus captivated these susceptible "subs" was one Mrs. Verigay, "a charming widow from the hills" (as she was universally spoken of), and a particular friend of Mrs. Simkin's.

This lively little lady and the colonel's wife represented the fair sex in camp, two or three hard-riding officers from the station completing the party. Mrs. Simkin generally went out with her husband on these sporting trips to superintend the commissariat and look after the sportsmen's comfort, and on this occasion begged Mrs. Verigay to accompany her, who, it is needless to say, jumped at the offer since she knew she would have two such ardent lovers in camp to amuse her. A terrible flirt Mrs. Verigay, it must be confessed, but there was no harm in her—at least, let us hope not; yet

Be thou chaste as ice, as pure as snow,
Thou shalt not escape calumny—

and it was scarcely likely that such a fascinating little woman, with so many jealous rivals of her own sex, should

go unscathed in that hot-bed of scandal, an Indian station; nor did she.

But be that as it may, Mrs. Verigay drove her pair of youngsters in Cupid's curriole with consummate skill, kept them both well in hand—never allowing one to jib against the other—and gave to each exactly the same amount of rein and the same amount of attention.

At this season the nights in camp were marvellously brilliant, with a tropical moon turning darkness into day; and there was a crisp freshness in the air, which made it cosy to sit round a blazing log-fire outside the mess-tent after dinner.

There the jovial little circle told ghost stories, ran over their sporting adventures or sang songs to beguile the evening hours, and every night from the majestic peepul-grove, to the wild accompaniment of the jackal's yell might be heard trolled out in sonorous tones that well-known pigsticker's chorus:

The boar, the boar, the mighty boar,
The brave old boar of the plain!
Here's a health to him who fears no fall,
And the next great boar that's slain.

But while the toast of the brawny pig was on their lips, another toast, that of woman, sweet woman (otherwise Cissie Verigay), dwelt deep in the hearts of two of those musical sportsmen.

By-and-by as song, chat, and laughter flagged, and some dropped off to sleep in their easy chairs, or turned into their tents for the night, others wandered out into the bright moonlight for a romantic ramble; *others* in this case meaning either Mrs. Verigay and Ensign Spoonley, or Mrs. Verigay and Ensign Mashwell, whosever turn it happened to be, for the widow managed these walks with amazing tact, and generally contrived to favour both in the same evening, thereby preventing the chance of bloodshed.

"Now then, Spoonley, my lad," whispered Colonel Simkin one night as he saw Mrs. Verigay and Mashwell steal away together from the camp out into the moonlight, "stop where you are and have another peg. Two's company, three's none, as the boy on the donkey said when the devil jumped up behind. It's the Masher's innings—give him a chance."

"Poor beggar," thought Spoonley pityingly, "so I will. She's only humouring him—of course I know it's all right. Didn't she as good as tell me before dinner that she would be mine, and mine alone? What more can a fellow want?"

And so reflecting comfortably the happy lover settled himself down beside his host, with a huge Trichinopolee cheroot in his mouth and confidence in his heart. Long time they sat with their four legs stretched out over the protruding arms of their cane-bottomed chairs, chatting drowsily, whiffing and sipping; two pegs apiece disappeared, two cheroots went to ashes; the log fire burnt low and the colonel snored. Still those two returned not.

At length Spoonley became fidgety, rose suddenly from his chair and—no he wouldn't play the spy, why need he? (In truth he dared not, for fear of offending the widow.) So he sneaked up to the mess-tent instead and ordered another peg stealthily, a strong one; then returned to his seat feeling more composes. Indeed, such a still beautiful night was conducive to composure, especially when backed up by several brandies and sodas.

In the open country around it was almost as light as day; a shimmering light which glinted through the dense foliage of the peepul tops and made the tents loom

grey-black through the partial darkness—the darkness made more apparent by those struggling rays.

Distant sounds fell upon the silence of the night—more or less dreamy sounds at that late hour—the muffled "tom-tom" from the far-off village, the faint tinkling of the cow-bell, the hoarse bark of the everlasting pariah; but one by one these died upon the senses, or became merged in the dreams of Ensign Spoonley.

* * * * *

"Then you mean to say you love him too?"

"I do—I confess I do."

"What, better than me?"

"Well, I won't say that; indeed, I don't know which I love the better yet."

These murmured sentences broke upon the slumbering Spoonley's deadened ears, 'twixt sleeping and waking, and the words exactly dove-tailed in with that which he had been dreaming.

He jumped to his feet with a start and a groan—the groan being partly caused by "pins and needles," partly by what he heard, and partly by what he saw, namely, the "widow" and the "masher" standing lovingly together beside the smouldering embers and almost within his touch.

"Oh, you're awake, are you, Mr. Spoonley?" said the silvery voice of the Siren, which to him sounded rather like irony. "Now, listen to me," she went on, with a little puzzled expression on her pretty face and nestling towards him in turn, "I'm in a fix, my dear boys, like the donkey between two sacks of hay. You have both proposed to me within the last few hours, and I really don't know what to say. I can't accept you both, *can I*? So, I tell you what—I'll make a proposal to you in return—ah! and here comes our dear hostess who shall witness the compact! Pray forgive us for being so late my dear," she exclaimed, as Mrs. Simkin joined them (the colonel had long since retired without waking Spoonley), "but we have rather important business to settle!" Here she gave a sly look and a smile at her friend which the lady seemed quite to understand. "Ahem! These two gentlemen, my dear Mrs. Simkin, I must inform you, have been good enough each to honour me to-day with an offer of marriage, and as I cannot at this moment make up my mind which to accept—" (Here both suitors drew themselves up to their full height and scowled at each other, whilst the "charming widow" smiled sweetly and impartially upon the pair.) "I say, as I don't know *which* to accept," she continued, "I propose that I like the knights of old they should ride a 'tilt' for my hand!"

"A capital idea," cried Mrs. Simkin, looking askance at the love-stricken ensigns, "a capital idea, and the best way out of the difficulty!"

"Well, to-morrow, as there is to be a grand beat for 'pig,'" went on Mrs. Verigay in a very business-like tone, "I can only add that, of you two, he who wins first spear in the first contest falling to either may come to me and—claim his well-earned reward."

Ensigns Spoonley and Mashwell started; they were taken aback and not a little indignant. There was a levity, an absurdity, about such a condition that jarred upon their sensitive natures; yet, despite a murmured remonstrance, they eventually bound themselves by the compact.

A few minutes later as the amorous rivals retired to their tents to gather strength from sleep for the coming struggle, suppressed laughter from the ladies reached their ears and the words:

"What will the Great Mogul say to this to-morrow when he comes? Ha, ha, ha!"
The Great Mogul! Who was the Great Mogul?

Early next morning the pig-stickers duly assembled in the "dewan-khana," at "chota hazree," or little breakfast, our two young friends attired in the most approved fashion. Nor did they leave anything to chance in the matter of gear, though they little guessed, when they so carefully equipped themselves, for what a priceless stake they were going to compete.

Their saddlery was of the best, and their spears the most reliable, with steel heads of the correct "sealed" pattern, and shafts of stout male bamboo, cut, so they avowed, with all regard to native superstition—that is, at night by the light of the new moon; not of the moon of the night before, of course, but by some other moon guaranteed by the vendor.

Their horses were two wily screws (half-bred Arab "casters" from the native cavalry), which happened to be well matched in point of speed; and each ardent swain, though still chafing inwardly at the undignified nature of the compact, felt sanguine of his own success.

The ladies put in an appearance at breakfast before the sportsmen started from the camp, and Mrs. Verigay stimulated her admiring griffins afresh with the sweet words and looks which she bestowed on each in private with perfect impartiality; begging them, with the most earnest appeal with her liquid eyes, to be very careful that they didn't break their precious necks.

Meanwhile Mrs. Simkin had confided to her husband the conditions under which the ensigns were to "ride to pig" that day, and which conditions Colonel Simkin, having heard and chuckled over, kept to himself so as not to spoil sport. He proceeded to pair off his spears (of which there were half-a-dozen in all) after the fashion of the old Nugger Hunt, taking care to couple the griffs, and then gave the word to start.

Thereupon the party mounted and trotted off towards the distant "rummah-grass" jungle, where the first "honkwa" or beat was to commence; and as they left the shady peepul-grove the two youthful knights of the bamboo surreptitiously snatched separate moments to wave and kiss their "gauntlets" gallantly to the queen of their hearts.

On arriving at the covert-side the spears were quickly

posted, each sportsman dismounting and waiting anxiously for the commencement of operations. A line of coolies, with sticks and native unmusical instruments formed the beat, and a most unearthly noise they made on being given the signal to begin.

In short the wild yells, the thrumming of the "tom-toms," the hollow bass of the "doobla," or big drum, the "wah-wahing," and now and again the winding blast of the conch, was enough to arouse the departed spirits of the wild boars which had been "stuck" since the conquest of the country. By such a fiendish row any porcine family hidden in the jungle was pretty sure to be set moving before many seconds had passed.

Presently excited shouts, responded to by deep spasmodic grunts and the waving of the tall yellow grass, announced the fact that the quarry was afoot—that a big sounder had been started.

Hurrah! Away they scamper in front of the beaters, tearing fiercely through the long, reedy jungle.

The hearts of the rival griffs were thumping like a couple of donkey engines as they heard the grunting sounder approach the border of the jungle nearest to them!

Oh, what moments of suspense! It seemed as if they never would break! But at last one porker thrusts his snout out of the thick cover, and the next moment follows it with his fat, hairy body, which is followed in turn by nine or ten more fat, hairy bodies, the last to leave their stronghold being a huge monster as big as a donkey, the mighty father of the family.

For a moment the hoary patriarch halts and listens, with his little, twinkling eyes flashing with anger, and his head thrown on

one side; then, with a sonorous snort of defiance, away he shambles after the others.

A stentorian "Tally-ho!" is now heard from the colonel, followed by "Go-o-on away, my boys!" and every man leaps nimbly into his saddle and grips his horse with muscular energy; Ensigns, Spoonley and Mashwell cannoning against each other as they try to mount, both by their own over-eagerness and the dancing fretfulness or their impetuous steeds.

"Confound it all, my dear fellow, where are you coming to?"

"Well, do look out yourself, man, it's not my fault!"

But there is no time to argue, the quarry has broken, and their business is to ride—to ride for their very lives—for love! for honour! for Mrs. Verigay! for everything in the world worth living for.



Both suitors drew themselves up to their full height and scowled at each other.

The country around looks good going enough at a glance, yet there are nasty quicksands, bandicoot holes, and other pit-falls to bring the unwary to grief; but who thinks of such trifles in those maddening moments? who cares for rocks, stones, nullahs, cacti or prickly pear with the pig before them and a good nag underneath them?—who thinks of the poor horses' broken knees or the rider's broken bones?—who thinks of anything save that one great prize, *the first spear?*

The sounder are given a start of some four hundred yards, and are seen heading for a tamarisk thicket in the distance; but long before they can reach it the thundering horsemen will be in their midst and scatter them to the four quarters of the wind.

"Forrard! forr-rard!"

Away the hunters dash in the wild intoxicating race, flying past clumps of palms and sand-hills, over acacia bushes, deep fissures, and almost unjumpable ravines—down into a dry stony nullah, and clambering up the steep bank opposite, with a shout and a hustle, and the agility of so many cats accustomed to scaling the perpendicular—onward they rush with ringing clatter! Oh, what a delirious blood-boiling gallop! Such thrilling moments once felt are never to be forgotten in a lifetime! Talk of foxhunting, let our top-sawyers of the shires only try this sport once if they want a new sensation, and when they have tried it, we warrant they will say with us that of all sport in the saddle the palm must be given to pig-sticking.

Every eye is fixed on the big boar, and every man picks him out from the rest for his own spear, as something worthy of his steel. Gradually the horseman gains on the panic-stricken sounder; but in that furious spurt two or three falls have already occurred, albeit

our indomitable griffins are still to the front—well to the front, too, as they find to their delight—for their high blooded casters prove faster for the short distance than any of the other horses out.

Hand over hand they now draw up to the flying pig; bit to bit, and knee to knee, they race along, straining every nerve to detach the old jungle-king from his subjects, and ride him down by themselves.

Presently to their joy the foam flecked monster separates of his own accord from the now flagging herd, and takes an independent line, followed at once by the excited youngsters.

The colonel is watching them to see fair play, and is glad to notice that the rest of the party are not likely to interfere in this keenly contested match.

Now they are almost upon him. See, he is nearly done, look how he sways from side to side like a drunken man and his dashing enemies increase their superhuman efforts to snatch the much coveted honour—always coveted—but now, their whole future and happiness depending on the issue. No wonder they yell like escaped lunatics and ride like fiends.

It is a critical moment. But just as they are at his quarters, the hard pressed quarry doubles sharp and throws them off his line, then darts away in a new direction and suddenly disappears.

Good heavens, where's he gone to?

The mystery is quickly solved. The boar has merely dropped sheer twenty feet into a dry nullah a few yards ahead. His baffled pursuers manage to pull up in the very nick of time to save their necks, and view the old varmint afterwards clambering up the opposite bank, on reaching the top of which he halts, as much as to challenge them to "come on," and then with a contemptuous "whoof" and a flourish of his tail scuttles away once more across the "Maidan."

With shouts and smothered oaths the delirious sportsmen gallop along the nullah side, in the vain hope of finding some rideable spot where they may cross, but failing, charge valiantly together at the least precipitous part, and are rewarded for their pluck by scrambling over somehow and escaping a nasty spill by the very skin of their teeth. The cunning old boar has meantime got a fresh start of them, but he is badly blown, and very soon they are at his heels again.

He sees his danger and twists sharply from one to the other like a coursed hare, but his pertinacious foes stick closely to him, and the next instant both flesh their blades simultaneously in his brawny neck. "Who-hoop! First spear!" shouts each triumphant youth, as they dart forward and withdraw their points.

But the wounds are slight, though the spurting blood is sufficient to prove them, and now the furious hog, with every bristle on end, is brought to bay!

"First spear!" again scream the excited griffins, wheeling sharply round to finish off their work.

But Colonel Simkin has seen it all and shouts hoarsely in reply:

"No, no, dead heat! dead heat! as I live! At him again, my lads!"

But now the foaming patriarch, whose frothy mouth, bepainted all with red, like milk and blood being mingled both together—

takes the offensive, and with an angry roar charges full tilt at Spoonley



"My dear fellow, where are you coming to?"

knocks his caster's legs from under him with an ugly gash which lays open one cannon-bone, and brings horse and rider sprawling to mother earth. Then like lightning, before Mashwell can turn aside, he charges again and upsets him also, horse and all, in the same dexterous fashion.

Now indeed it might have fared badly with either or both of the prostrate griffins had not the colonel dashed up opportunely and buried his shaft behind the plucky old tusker's shoulder, transfixing the heart, and rolling him over in his death agony.

"Bravo, colonel! bravo boys!" shout the others as they come up one by one, and see the dazed ensigns bruised and bleeding and their horses' legs cut to the bone, but also see lying weltering in his life-blood at their feet the mighty hero of the jungle, as gallant a boar as ever bit the dust, thirty-seven inches at the shoulder, with a splendid pair of tusks, nine inches long!

Bravo indeed!

Dead heat for first spear! There was no doubt about it, according to the colonel—but it was hard lines! the disappointment was intense—yet both felt they had ridden straight and pluckily (the only chance a man has in such a sport as pig-sticking), and so said all. But this was not to be the end—not by any means the end. That first spear must be won beyond dispute, and so to pastures new where they may try conclusions again without delay.

* * * * *

About an hour after tiffin-time, two "dhoolies," or palanquins, were carried into camp—the said dhoolies (which the colonel had been obliged to procure for the purpose) containing what remained of the heroic ensigns who had that day risked life and limb—and all for her!

Behind the dhoolies came the two "syces" (grooms) leading two jaded, lame-on-all-fours, broken-kneed, broken-winded, mud-blood-and-lather-covered steeds—the fiery casters of the morning.

Poor brutes, they had had a hard time of it indeed, but not more so than their riders.

After the disappointment of the "dead heat," the enthusiastic griffs were more on their mettle than ever—more resolved to do or die—and they certainly did half kill themselves in their vain but frantic efforts to win an indisputable first spear.

Cropper after cropper had they come—were cut and bruised from head to foot and smarted all over from the cruel effects of prickly pear.

For the fact must be told that during one of their fierce struggles they had actually ridden at each other in their jealous desperation and rolled over together in a convenient clump of that uncompromising cactus, so that though the Colonel had saved them from being wounded by the boar, they carried the marks as of a hard conflict.

Now each again claimed "first spear" for the second time that morning, but it had been a near thing, and no one was up to see, so they returned into camp arguing the point clamorously from their dhoolies, and appealed at once to the charming widow, who came forth from the peepul-grove to receive them in her most loving and solicitous manner.

"Don't believe him, Mrs. Verigay, it might have been

a dead heat the first time, as the colonel says so, but the second I'll take my oath wasn't, I was at least two lengths before him."



They returned into camp arguing the point from their dhoolies.

"Oh, I like you, Spoonley, look here, Mrs. Verigay, 'pon my soul and honour, I—"

"I tell you you weren't, and you know perfectly well that—"

"Then you mean to say I'm a liar, sir, because if so—"

"I mean to say no gentleman would deliberately—"

"There, there, my dear boys, hush, pray hush," cooed the dulcet voice of the bewitching 'widow.' "What am I to do with you?" (Here Mrs. Simkin appeared.) "You both claim first spear, do you? And therefore both claim me, I suppose. Well, there's only one person in the world who can decide the point, is there, my dear?" turning to Mrs. Simkin—"and that person is the great Mogul!" (The Great Mogul! Who the dickens is this Great Mogul?) "Ah, and here he comes. Gentlemen, allow me to introduce you—Mr. Mashwell, Mr. Spoonley, Mr. Verigay, my husband."

Oh, it was a cruel joke, though a cleverly kept secret—enough to make those poor confiding griffs turn misogynists on the spot and forswear the fair sex for ever. But they didn't, nothing of the sort.

They were young and recovered from their wounds, moral and corporal, long before their wretched horses did. Now we hear they are greater pals than ever, and have come across many more "charming widows," but are very careful never to both go after the same woman again, at any rate at the same time.

QUI-HATE.

The Sanctuary on the Rock.

THERE was a marked difference in Ralph Hornby when he returned from that tour in France; it was a long time before we discovered what had taken place. But when we did learn all about it, we were amused and pleased to find that a woman had wrought in him the very change which he had always said no woman could bring about in any man.

That was a sweeping declaration of his, but it exactly indicated his opinions. His estimate of women in general was not a high one; he smiled sarcastically at stories of their love and devotion, and declared that they were all nonsense.

A girl would remain "true" to her lover just so long as she did not meet another man with better prospects or more money, and in support of his assertion he pointed to the number of broken engagements and second marriages.

His arguments were no more logical than his notion was correct, but no one succeeded in bringing about an alteration and he was allowed to continue in his cynical frame of mind. His mother died when he was a mere infant and he had no sisters; that was the excuse which charitable people urged in his behalf.

Naturally, the change was quickly noticed. How it was brought about is told in the following story.

Ralph Hornby spent a month at a fashionable watering place on the French coast, and it did not take him more than a fortnight to get very tired of the society into which he was thrown. He had been brought up partly in France and was as much at home there as in his own country, but this did not prevent him from tiring of the same tittle-tattle, the same routine, day after day.

"This sort of thing will drive me back across the Channel—if it doesn't drive me mad—in no time," he muttered one afternoon as he strolled further along the sandy beach than was his wont. "I wonder where I should get to if I went on walking for an hour or so? It looks pretty wild along there, with the rocks and reefs. I can imagine that it would be an awkward place for a ship in rough weather. Well, it may be lonely, but that will be a change, so I'll go."

He walked on for some time, lost in thought and paying no heed to the scenery which he had gone that way on purpose to see. He awoke from his day-dream with a start and looked about him.

It certainly was a lonely spot. He was in a hollow; some distance behind him lay the cliffs on which was the village or town whence he had started; almost at the same distance in front of him there arose rock after rock; on his right was the immensity of the ocean, and on his left a long stretch of sand with a background of forest.

"Pretty dismal, this," he muttered. "I think I can just about manage to get to those rocks; then I shall rest and afterwards tramp back. By that time I ought to be fatigued enough to go to bed early and sleep like a top. In that way I shall escape the routine of one half-day, at any rate."

He did not expect to find anything interesting or attractive on the rocks, but in this he was mistaken

When he reached the foot of the first, which rose to a height of about one hundred feet, he thought he could distinguish something on the summit, and he resolved to climb up and reconnoitre. It was not particularly easy work, but by making use of his hands and toes he reached the top rather hot and a little out of breath.

The first thing that caught his eye was a roughly-moulded figure evidently intended to represent the Virgin Mary, around which were neatly placed nearly a dozen vases filled with fresh cut flowers. Ralph looked at the flowers in surprise; who could it be that came to this lonely spot with fresh flowers? Who could it be who had turned the bare summit of a rock into a sanctuary? A woman. So much was clear, so much was readily admitted by Ralph, who began to experience a feeling of reverence which was not common to him.

He walked round to the other side of the ledge and peered over. It was not inviting; the other rocks were more distant than he had expected, and below him was an abyss of water. He saw the jagged rocks, almost covered by the waves, and he shuddered as he realised how dangerous the Channel was and how hopeless would be the fate of any craft that might be driven within half-a-mile of where he stood. Out at sea he saw the bell-buoy intended to warn mariners to keep away from the hidden and half-hidden reefs. Landwards, the rock sloped towards the edge of the forest.

He turned again to the little sanctuary, gazing curiously at the rough figure and at the fresh pinks, roses and wild immortelles, so daintily arranged in the vases. It was strange; he must find out who did it.

He stayed there for a good half-hour, half-expecting that someone would appear; but he remained alone, and finally turned his face towards "civilisation."

Every day for a whole week he made what he called his pilgrimage; he varied the time of his arrival at the rock in the hope of being able to surprise the worshipper at this isolated shrine, but in vain.

The flowers were always kept fresh; they never showed signs of drooping and they were always of the same kind, and he began to wonder—with a feeling of awe—whether some miracle was being wrought or whether the flowers were renewed by human hands.

Unconsciously, a change began to take place in Ralph Hornby; he became more meditative and his flippant utterances became fewer. He could not believe in a miracle, and this brought him face to face with an instance of devotion at which he would have sneered only a few weeks previously.

He cast himself on the sand at the foot of the rock and remained there in deep thought until the waves began to reach his feet, when he became aware that the rising tide had cut off his chance of returning along the sand beach.

He did not clamber up the rock again at that point, but walked inland until he reached a more favourable spot; then he reached a higher land and made his way towards the pine forest, which ran parallel with the beach, with the intention of making his way homeward by a path through the woodland if he could find one.

Ralph Hornby was not a lover of nature and took but little notice of the beauty of the forest as he followed the indistinct footpath which wound in and out of the pine trees. He stumbled here and there over the brushwood, alternately wondering whether he would be able to find his way to his hotel, and where the pinks, roses, and wild immortelles came from.

Just for a moment the thought flashed across his mind that he was falling in love with an unknown—*he*, Ralph Hornby—and he laughed rather uneasily.

"This is a lively sort of path, and it will be getting dark before long."

He had just given half-audible utterance to this reflection when he caught sight of a cottage or cabin almost hidden away under the trees.

"Hallo, here's a chance of getting a little refreshment!"

A woman of matronly appearance was cutting up beans for cooking, and about her roamed some fowls intent on finding a meal. It was a lonely spot for anyone to live in, yet there was an air of comfort about it which made Hornby step briskly towards the woman and ask for something to drink.

The woman turned on her stool, looked through the door into the room and nodded. Ralph turned in order to see what this pantomime meant; he fancied that he detected a feminine figure disappearing through another door.

With his usual politeness he entered into conversation with his temporary hostess, their talk being interrupted a minute later by a young woman with a glass of water. Ralph repressed a start of surprise as he faced the newcomer; she was dressed in poor clothes, but her face was unlike that of any woman he had seen—it struck him by its expression of simple trustfulness and by the animation of the eyes, both giving the countenance a charm beyond comparison.

"You have vegetables here, but no flowers?" asked Ralph of the elder woman, as an idea came to him.

"Oh, yes; indeed we have!" replied the younger woman quickly. "If you look through that door right away over the market garden you will see some flowers."

Ralph looked in the direction indicated and saw pinks and roses of exactly the same kind as those in the vases on the rock. He glanced inquiringly at the speaker, who coloured a little at having her secret discovered—at least, that was how Ralph interpreted the flush.

Ralph Hornby did not sleep well that night, which fact he attributed to the length of his excursion during the afternoon. He was awake by five on the following morning, and at six o'clock he was on his way to the rock, this action stultifying his own explanation of the cause of his unrest.

Perhaps, after all, it was not the girl he had seen who placed the flowers round the rough figure on the rock. This thought tormented him and he did not seek to find out why it affected him to such an extent.

Surely, those flowers were grown in other parts of the forest, or nearer at hand, than at the back of that hut! It was early and he might see her at the shrine; he would see her, if he had to wait all day.

His heart gave a great bound, when, from the sandy beach, he saw a figure above him. Slowly, as cautiously and as noiselessly as he could, he ascended the side of the rock and reached the top; he had wished to reach the living figure before his approach could be noticed and he had succeeded.

Before him was the girl he had hoped to find; she was kneeling, looking towards the sea—the great sea

that was so calm just then, which could be so cruel—kneeling in an attitude of supplication.

Ralph stood transfixed, his eyes rivetted on the girl's face. It was a pain face, yet how beautiful it looked now. He had thought it charming yesterday, but he recognised that love and devotion can effect a wonderful change. Here was the love and the devotion, at which he had so often scoffed, combined with the religious spirit which makes it more profound.

Yes, she was praying for the safe home-coming of a father, of a sweetheart, who was away on the deep sea. He looked seawards and noticed for the first time a fleet of fishing-smacks on the horizon; they were going on a voyage.

Sweetheart! If she were praying for a sweetheart, then he was confronted by an instance which flatly contradicted all he had said. He admitted it—admitted that he was wrong; and then a feeling of resentment sprang up within him.

Why should another possess this woman? She had shown him, unknowingly, that a woman could be so far above his estimate that he wanted her for himself. She had taught him so much, she must teach him more!

She arose at that moment and saw him. He doffed his cap in salutation, and she responded with a faint "Good morning," and smiled in recognition. She did not seem at all abashed. He must find out at once whether there was a sweetheart; he feared there was.

"You were praying for the safe return of one who is dear to you?" he asked meaningfully, though half-ashamed of his intrusion.

"Yes, for Jean," she answered artlessly.

"He will be away a long time?"

"Yes," she answered again with just a trace of sadness. "He is dead. He died there, in the channel, trying to rescue the crew of a sinking ship."

There was a long pause. Then:

"You bring these flowers every day?" asked Ralph.

"Yes, Jean loved these flowers and this was our favourite spot. Here we vowed to be true to each other in life and death. It has pleased the good God to take him from me, but I know that as he looks down from above Jean will be pleased that I keep these flowers fresh. It is two years ago now, but I shall keep them fresh until I go to meet him."

So Ralph Hornby came back to England cured of his cynicism; and by an irony of fate he himself has remained true to the girl with whom he fell in love, but who knew not of that love.

As with Ralph, so with others; women have the power to work the salvation of men if they care to exercise it.

GEO. KNIGHT.

SOME RATTLING SHORT STORIES

will be found in the Christmas Number of

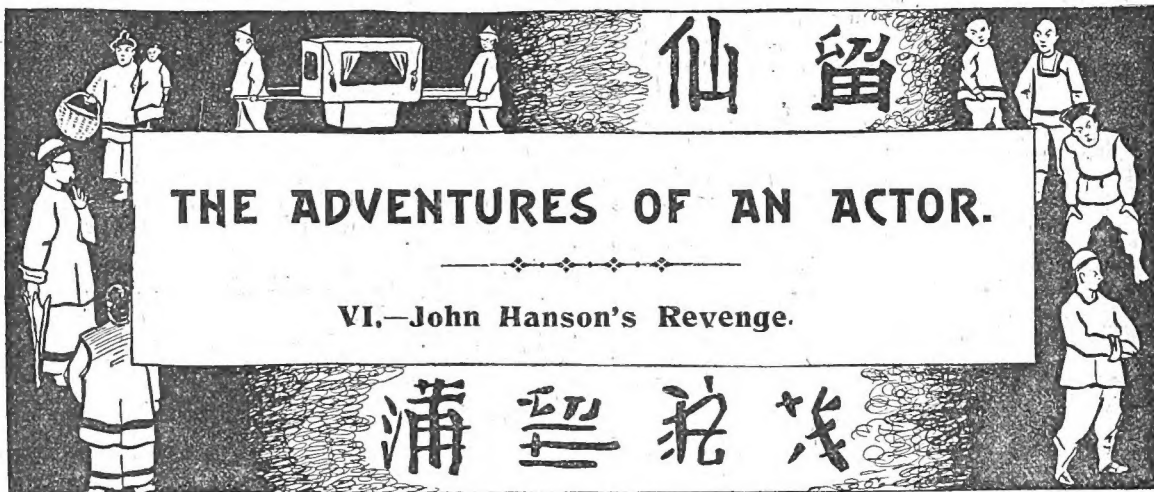
THE ROYAL.

READY THURSDAY NEXT.

Stories of the Sea, of Travel, of Society, of Adventure, of Children, of Court Life.

All magnificently illustrated by the leading black and white artists.

Don't Forget. The Xmas Royal. Next Week.



At Christmas time Ben Jowson always had a few weeks stock season at the Grand Theatre, Crumbleby, before the travelling pantomime deigned to book his wretched shanty.

Jowson was the sole proprietor, lessee and manager of a theatre, colloquially known as the disgrace of the North. He was proverbially mean and would not spend a penny on keeping the place in decent repair, at least so far as the back of it was concerned. He would sometimes consent to a little tinkering to the roof, where it let the rain through on the heads of the audience. But the dressing-rooms, generally by some fate the last portion of the theatre thought of, here were no exception to the rule. The floors were full of holes, and to escape a sprained ankle one needed to walk them with caution.

When the weather was bad the wind blew through and through them; water streamed from the roof, and down the walls, making existence anything but pleasant.

We were in the middle of the fourth and last week of the stock season, when the events happened that I am about to relate. Most of us were young and strong and had so far escaped with the usual coughs and colds expected at Jowson's theatre.

John Hanson's wife, our character old woman, had not fared so well. She struggled on to the end of the second week, then utterly collapsed, and had since been lying at her lodgings in a precarious condition.

The old man was quite broken down over her illness. His heart was not in his work one could see; he spoke his lines mechanically, and, unlike him, constantly dried up in the most pitiful manner. All the grand old school, grip and power, had gone out of his work. He was thinking, poor fellow, of his dearest in the world lying helpless in their poor lodgings.

"Well, John," said Bann, the heavy man, as Hanson entered the dressing-room, late on the Thursday night, "how is she to-night?"

"Worse and worse, my boy, thank you, I fear there is no hope."

"No, no, don't say that," we all exclaimed.

"It's true, my lads, quite true, I fear Margy's and my partnership is going to end. It is hard, very hard after five-and-twenty years together, in good times and bad.

If she dies my life goes out with hers. The world will be dead to me if she leaves it."

We tried to comfort him, but it was a sorry task.

"That wretch Jowson ought to be hanged," exclaimed our fire-eating Juvenile man. "I'm blessed if I don't punch the life out of his fat carcass, when I've got my last week's salary. For I shall never come back to this death trap."

"Yes, my boy," said Hanson, "that's just what it is, a death trap, and what do you think the beast has done? Margy is ill, dying, all through his rotten theatre, and he has stopped her salary just when I want all the cash I can get hold of to buy her medicine, and delicacies."

"Oh, what a wicked shame," exclaimed the Juvenile man.

"Why don't you see him about it," I said, "surely he is human?"

"Not where his purse is concerned," replied Bann.

In spite of Bann's unhelpfulness we persuaded John to appeal to Jowson that very night, but it was not until the next morning that he managed to catch him in front of the theatre.

The interview, and the results of which, he has often since related to me in every detail, for John knew my tongue would be silent while he lived.

Jowson was busy opening letters in his office when John presented himself.

Just glancing over his shoulder at him, as he stood in the doorway, Jowson said:

"Treasury is on Saturday night, after the show, (no runaways for me) and you can't sub. any more before then."

"I don't want money, Mr. Jowson, I want justice. And as to running away, I have never done that in my life, nor am I likely to commence when I have my poor wife at death's door; though by Heaven, there is inducement enough to run away from this death trap."

"Humph! I suppose you are referring to my theatre, Mr. Hanson. Well, all I can say is, that you are the first actor I have ever had a complaint from, and I have been here for fifteen years," said Jowson, intrenching himself behind a form of argument, as old as it is ridiculous.

"Then more shame to them for being either cowards,

or long-suffering idiots," replied John. "I suppose it never occurred to you the place might require renovating?"

"Look here, Mr. Hanson, my time is valuable, and I can't afford to waste it with a grumbler. What do you want to say to me?"

"I want to ask you what you are going to do about my wife. She is dying from inflammation of the lungs, caught in one of your dressing-rooms, wet and draughty, and absolutely uninhabitable, a place unfit to stable an ox. I have a long doctor's bill to pay, not to mention other expenses. You have stopped her salary; I have come here to appeal to your generosity, and to ask you to re-consider the matter."

"You know my rule, Mr. Hanson, no play, no pay."

"Mr. Jowson, I have been in the profession for over thirty years, and have never known the rule enforced when the illness occurred through fault of the management."

"Oh, my fault, is it? Why is no one else ill?"

"They are young and strong enough to cope with damp and cold. It is very different when one is old."

"My dear sir, I can't help your troubles."

"Will you at least pay the doctor's bill?"

"Perhaps you would like me to keep you and your family altogether, Mr. Hanson, for as long as you are pleased to live," said Jowson, insolently.

"Man, man, haven't you an ounce of humanity in your whole composition?" cried John in a breaking voice.

"I am no fool, Hanson, to be taken by every idle tale. I think you have said enough; good morning," said Jowson angrily.

"Ye gods, what man is this!" exclaimed John despairingly, with hand lifted in appeal to Heaven.

"No more heroics, Hanson, leave the office," cried Jowson in his bullying tones.

"Ah, you know you are safe, you lily-livered scoundrel. You know I am too poor to take my case into court. I should get justice there."

"Leave the office," Jowson shouted.

John looked at the man for a moment in silence.

His sunken glittering eye had often thrilled an audience, and the coward before him now trembled under his glance. He made one step towards him, as if to seize him by the throat, Jowson cried out in terror, and John hesitated.

Though nearing sixty years of age John was as strong as a lion, while the younger man was helpless and weak with bloated fat.

"Bah! I would not pollute my soul with your miserable death," cried John, "but remember this, Ben Jowson, if my wife dies, hers will be the last death this theatre will ever cause."

So saying he left the office, slamming the door after him.

He walked quickly past the houses into the fields until his anger cooled, and then he turned his steps homeward. Home! No he could not go back to the misery that awaited him there; he knew his duty called him, but he salved his conscience with the thought that Margy hardly knew him now, and had he not sat up with her all night?

So he turned into the Red Lion Hotel, near the theatre, and sat down alone in a small bar, brooding over his wrongs, and blaming himself for not thrashing Jowson while he had the chance.

He was awakened from his apathy by the sound of

Jowson's voice coming from the saloon bar, which was only separated from him by a thin partition.

"Yes," Jowson was saying, "the beggar came into my office, threatened my life, and cursed and swore at me till I had to take him by the scruff of the neck, and kick him out of the theatre."

Hanson rose from his seat to give the lie to the boaster, but controlling himself sat down and listened again.

"You did quite right, Mr. Jowson," said a local voice, "he is a dangerous man, I don't like the look in his eyes at all."

"No, it's a kind of mad look, isn't it?" said another, "a man like that might do anything. Shoot you in the back, or set fire to your house."

"More likely set fire to the theatre as he is so dead against it," replied the first.

"I'll put the police on his track, if he's not careful, that's what I'll do," cried Jowson.

"I suppose you are fully insured, Jowson," asked one of his friends.

"No, I've been in that theatre for fifteen years now, and I haven't wasted a penny in making insurance companies rich, and I'm not going to start now."

"Well I don't know. Everybody insures now-a-days, you know," was the reply.

Hanson did not wait to hear any more. He crept out of the bar, and went home with new thoughts burning in his brain, and a cunning smile on his face. He turned at the top of the street and waving his hand at the Red Lion, said aloud:

"Thank you, my enemies, thank you."

Mrs. Hanson died on Saturday morning, shortly after midnight. We were surprised at the calm way in which John took the blow. When we went to offer our condolences he only said:

"Thank you, my lads, thank you, I am glad Margy is at rest. She is happier now. It is only my selfishness that would bring her back to life, to struggle, and toil once more."

That night he played with all his old fire and strength as if trouble had not visited him. But when during one of the *entr'actes* the orchestra played in a selection that ever dear old air, "Home sweet home," it awakened in him fond memories, and he laid his poor old grey head on his breast and wept like a child.

After the performance that night John left the theatre with the rest of us, and went home. When the household he lodged with had locked all doors and gone to bed he went upstairs and remained kneeling for some minutes by Margy's bedside, then he rose to his feet, kissed her cold lips, and stealing downstairs left the house by the back door unheard.

The men were busy loading a trolley with our baggage when he arrived at the theatre, and in the hurry and bustle he entered unnoticed. He hid himself underneath the stage among the rafters and beams of the traps waiting there until the hall-keeper made his final round to turn off the gas at the metre, not five yards from him, and lock all doors.

When the last sound had died away, he crept out of his hiding place, struck a match, and found his way to the gas metre. Taking a file from his pocket he set to work to file all the pipes through that lead to the theatre.

Then he took the large gas key from the corner in which he had seen the hall-keeper place it, and turned on the gas. While it was escaping he turned his attention to various heaps of rubbish; wood shavings the

carpenters had left in their recent work, preparing for the pantomime, old broken battens, and scenery stored there below the stage.

These he hurriedly piled in order of ignition against the flimsy walls of the dressing rooms, situated in a ramifying portion of the main building.

By the time his work was finished, and a goodly pile stood in front of him, the escaping gas became almost stifling, so he hastily set fire to the mass, and after waiting to see it had thoroughly caught, felt his way up the stairs on to the stage.

As he neared the top the sound of someone moving in the front of the theatre reached him, and for the moment his heart stood still with the fear of being discovered. He ran to the door at the side of the stage leading to the auditorium, and looking down the passage saw the glimmer of a light approaching him.

* * * * *

Was it the hand of fate that made Jowson pause as he approached the door of his house that night. His encounter with Hanson the day before, and the subsequent fears, the foolish imaginations of his friends had filled him with fear, had combined to make him very uneasy. His foot was on the door step when he remembered he had left a sum of money, amounting to a few pounds, in his office.

The house being a good one that night, he had reserved more cash than he had needed to meet current expenses. He had safely left money in his office for years during his ownership of the theatre, but this time he did not apply the argument he was so fond of.

Hanson might break into the theatre (not a very difficult task to one who knew the place) he reflected, break open the drawer that contained the gold, and steal it without fear of detection.

After looking carefully round the house to see that John was not on arson bent, he retraced his steps to the theatre, let himself in the front way and unlocking his office and the cash drawer, transferred the gold to his pocket. He was again about to leave the theatre when he thought he heard a sound proceeding from the vicinity of the stage. He listened and heard it again more distinctly.

"Heavens! It's Hanson come for the money," he said aloud, and went back again into the office.

Brave Ben kept a loaded revolver in his desk which he always carried when taking home large sums of money on dark nights. He drew forth this weapon, now, and lighting a taper went down the passage, muttering:

"I'll shoot the thief like a dog."

When the door at the end of the passage opened and shut, he quickened his steps. Just behind it he paused, and for a moment his nerve failed him.

He wondered whether Hanson stood on the other side ready to fell him as he entered, then considering how well armed he was, and that it might not be John after all, he threw open the iron door, and held the taper high above his head.

There stood Hanson in the middle of the stage with

desperation written on his face, for Jowson barred his only way of escape from the explosion that was bound to follow soon.

"So I have caught you redhanded, have I, you thief," shouted Jowson.

"Let me pass, for in two minutes we shall both be blown to the devil," cried John hoarsely, approaching him.

Jowson's answer was a report from the revolver. The bullet passed through the fleshy part of the old man's arm, but before Jowson could fire again he had him by the throat with one hand, and the revolver wrist by the other.

The taper fell to the ground still burning there, and by its fitful light the two men struggled. With John's grasp on his throat Jowson could not utter a sound, but managed to fire another couple of shots into the air from the revolver they struggled for.

It was the old man's left hand against Jowson's right, but so superior was the former's strength, that before he could fire again the revolver was wrenched out of his hand. Swinging it free, John brought down the butt end of the revolver on Jowson's head, who fell stunned like a pole-axed ox.

Trembling from head to foot with excitement, and weak from loss of blood that poured down his arm, John tried to raise the fallen man and drag him down the passage, but his powerful muscles gave way under nervous exhaustion. His hands refused to grasp and his arms to lift.

A few hours ago John would gladly have welcomed death, but now life seemed as dear to him as it had ever been. The fire he could hear crackling and roaring beneath him; volumes of smoke swept up the stairs, and the smell of gas every moment became stronger.

With reluctance he left Jowson lying there still insensible, and murmuring, half weeping, "poor fool, poor fool," he staggered down the passage, pulled himself up to a window, opened it, and let himself down to the ground by means of the iron piping, all of which he had arranged beforehand.

Home again, unseen and unheard, he bound up his wounded arm, and carefully packed his torn and blood-spattered clothes at the bottom of his basket. He had only just closed the bedroom door when a loud explosion rent the air, and a red glare shone through the window blind, becoming brighter every minute.

The town was soon a tir, and cries of fire, and the patter of clogs came from every side.

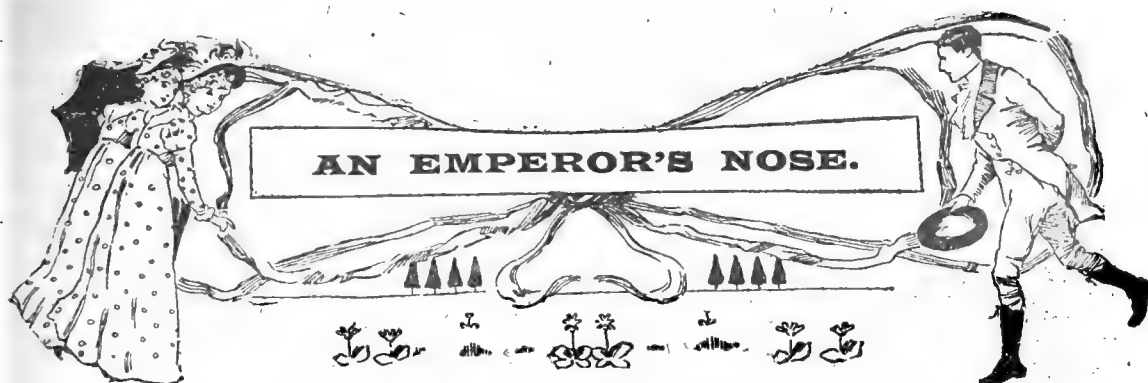
He feigned sleep until his landlady knocked him up to see the fire, then he went out with the rest. He waited there, watching the firemen's futile efforts to cope with the flames, until he heard the news that Ben Jowson was reported to be inside the building, and could not be saved. Then he went alone to his room, and sitting beside his wife's bedside, he whispered in her ear:

"Margy, darling, your death is avenged."

DOUGLAS VIGORS.

At the moment of going to press we have received the following telegram from Mr. Bowser:

"Coming back to town next week. Am starting to learn bicycling.—BOWSER."



Two years before the outbreak of the Franco-Prussian war, and the downfall of the last Napoleon, an Englishman named James Birney arrived in Paris from London. He was what might be called a jack of all trades. He had been a small merchant in Liverpool, a bookkeeper in Edinburgh, a manufacturer in Yorkshire and an editor in Portsmouth. He was a good natured, easy going man, taking life as he found it and making no fuss. If he got a few shillings in hand, he would find some new excuse to get rid of it; if he was out of funds, his creditors would have to extend his account. Nobody called him smart, but everybody said he had a strong fund of humour and philosophy.

When a man in Cincinnati invented a bullet-proof shirt, Mr. Birney somehow got hold of the European agency—that is, he went to Paris at least to bring the patent directly to the attention of the French emperor, who was always on the lookout for military novelties. The Englishman's cheek and persistency secured him an audience after weeks of red tape. He had insisted that he would not deal with the minister of war or any other official, and was at last granted an audience with the emperor. It was in the war-office, and several cabinet officials were present. A musket was lying on the table, and Napoleon greeted the agent with:

"Well, sir, what about this bullet-proof shirt?"

"I have it here, your majesty," was the reply as the shirt was held up to view.

"Put it on."

"With pleasure."

"Now go to the farther end of the room."

"Certainly, your majesty."

"Now, sir," continued the emperor as he lifted up the musket, "I am going to fire at your breast. Are you willing to take the chances?"

"Fire away!" was the reply.

The emperor fired, and although the bullet did not penetrate the shield the force of it knocked Birney head over heels and silenced him for the next ten minutes. While it was decided that the shirt was not a success the Englishman's nerve excited such admiration that he was given a handsome present in cash and graciously dismissed. He seemed to want to say something to the emperor before he left the room, but did not have opportunity. Early the next day, however, he bobbed up at the war-office for an interview with the minister.

"It is no use," said that official as he gave him a minute. "The emperor has decided that he will not buy the shirt."

"I knew that yesterday, of course," replied Birney. "I am not here about the shirt, but altogether another

thing. The fact is I do not like Napoleon's nose, and I want to improve it."

"Mon Dieu, man, but what do you say!" exclaimed the minister as he sprang to his feet.

"I say the emperor's nose is wrong, and that I can improve it. I wanted to tell him so the other day, but he hustled me out too quick. Can you bring about another interview?"

"The emperor's nose? You say it is wrong? You say you can alter it? Man what mean you?"

"I mean just what I say," calmly replied Birney. "I am not a surgeon, but several years ago I invented a little attachment to cure a badly-shaped nose. It has been tried in half-a-dozen cases and proved itself a big success. I brought one along with me, not knowing what I might run up against, and if you will give the emperor a hint—"

"Mon Dieu! Mon Dieu!" gasped the minister as he looked at the Englishman with wonder and terror in his eyes. "Then you have gone crazy! You are out of your mind. You know not what you say."

"I am all right from head to foot, my dear sir, and I can't understand your agitation. What's the matter with my scheme for improving Napoleon's nose?"

The minister rang his bell with nervous hand, and a minute later Birney was out on the pavement with a flea in his ear—that is, he was told to take himself off or he would be locked up as an insane person. It was rather a surprise for him, and it took him a day or two to get over it, but he finally came up smiling. If the minister would not help him, there were other officials who would. He tried two or three of them, with the result that he was eventually haled before the chief of police. That official probably sized him up correctly, for he said to him:

"You do not realise what you are doing. Don't you understand that you can be sent to prison for this? You do not appear to have lost your mind, and you are no fool, and the best thing you can do is to get out of Paris at once."

"But what is the crime?" argued Birney. "All I have done is to say that I can improve on the emperor's nose. Can a man be sent to prison in France for that?"

"He can, sir, as I wish to make you understand. You must not talk this way. You have made trouble for yourself, and you had best get away as soon as possible. Should the emperor himself hear of your insulting words you would be sent to some fortress for five or ten years."

"Shoo! You don't say so! But you Frenchmen are queer people! Well, I don't want to leave Paris

for a few days yet, but I'll keep quiet about Napoleon's nose. I had no idea he was so touchy about it. Not another word from me if that's the way things are."

The chief added another warning, though he saw the humour of the thing, and smiled behind his mask. Birney might stay on for a few days, but he must keep that nose attachment of his in the background and his tongue between his teeth. He went out of the police office meaning to do it, but scarcely twenty-four hours had passed away when he accidentally met a French doctor who could speak English fairly well. Birney was naturally asked why he had visited Paris, and of course he told of the bullet-proof shirt. Having got started, he couldn't stop there.

"I say, do you know I could alter the emperor's nose in less than a month?" he remarked in a burst of confidence. "Yes, sir. I could improve that proboscis of his at least fifty per cent. in three or four weeks, and I wouldn't charge a halfpenny either."

"The emperor's nose!" gasped the doctor. "But what ails the emperor's nose?"

"Out of plumb, sir, and no excuse for it. All I want is three weeks' time. Can't you get me an audience with him?"

"The dickens! Why, man, you are insulting the emperor! You ought to be locked up!"

"Oh, come now!" laughed Birney in a protesting way. "I never saw such people before. Can't the emperor's nose be out of plumb as well as any other man's?"

The doctor left him without even a cold bow, and probably went to the police, as Birney was arrested an hour later. According to his story, he was sent to prison without a trial and detained for a full year. Then he was taken out one day and conveyed to the war-office and into the presence of Napoleon.

"Sir," said the emperor after glaring at him for awhile, "is my nose out of plumb."

"It is as plumb as a plumbet," was the ready reply.

"Does it want any alteration?"

"Not the slightest."

"And how is it with yours?"

"It's out of joint, your majesty, but I think I could follow it out of France."

"Then you may try."

And try he did, and his nose led him back to the land of the free without any lingering on the road.

C. B. LEWIS.

THE YELLOW SEAL.

"Look here, Tommy, this is becoming absolute persecution. Just read this."

Tommy Singleton gingerly took between his finger and thumb the document handed to him by his friend.

"Um, um."

"DEAR MR. BRERETON.—I am alone this evening and have something to propose to you which, I think, will be to your advantage. Anyway, come, and we can discuss it.—FULVIA MASTERS."

"Oh, and you will go, I suppose?"

"I don't quite know. Tommy, I hate the whole thing. If I could believe that this visit was to be the last I'd go with a light heart."

"Well, then, don't go. It's easy, surely, for you to find an excuse. The woman hasn't hypnotised you, has she? If you don't want to go, why—don't go, that's all, and there's an end of it. I only wish the lady would make eyes at me—she's powerfully rich, isn't she?—I wouldn't hesitate. My boy, you don't sufficiently appreciate your opportunities. What does it matter if she's a trifle beyond the canonical age. Forty! It is a good age, a mellow age, a—"

"Oh, shut up!" irritably interrupted Brereton. "You know nothing about it. You go prospecting the town over as an unattached member of the ideal detective contingent, but in matters of this sort, in the reading of the more delicate problems, social or domestic, you're a child, Tommy—an innocent, a mere potterer and dabbler."

"Thanks, awfully. You've quite roused my interest and professional instinct."

"Professional! Why, Scotland Yard would repudiate you with scorn, wouldn't own you on 'free-service' terms even."

"And thou, too, Arthur! Well, well, time will unravel the skein of mystery and do me justice. You're going, I see. Now, don't be rash. If it is to your advantage to accept the widow's offer, proposal, or whatever it is, think twice before declining. By, by!"

Within half-an-hour Brereton was seated in Mrs. Masters' drawing-room in Phillimore Place.

Arthur Brereton, stockbroker's clerk—young, passably good-looking, impressionable, and mildly æsthetic—had made the acquaintance of Fulvia Masters, a rich widow, at an up-the-river bungalow during the past season. He interested her, and before long she attached him to her chariot-wheels in the capacity of trifle-holder, boon-companion, and devoted attendant generally.

There happening at this particular time to be no especial counter-attraction, Brereton fell in complaisantly enough with her humour, but when, later on, the lady developed tender tones, soft sighs, and a disposition to an early and late appropriation of his time and services, he began to find the situation to be somewhat tiresome.

Twenty-five without an adorable object is, in these days, certainly unusual, but Arthur Brereton was, for some reason or other, the proverbial exception. He had not as yet met with his fate, the fact fairly accounting for much that followed.

Each day did the widow become more pronounced in

her expressions of affectionate regard which, in a moment of thoughtless self-delusion, he professed to return. But the reaction was as cyclonic as had been the surrender. Alone and away from the influence of the widow's presence, in his right mind—if only temporarily—something nearly akin to disgust took with him the place of that other and strangely distorted state of mind.

The day arrived for the break-up of the house-party at Taplow and for the return of Brereton to City life. Since that time up to the evening of his visit, in response to her invitation, Fulvia Masters had, upon various pretexts, contrived to see much of him.

A rich woman, and with much idle capital, she would often drive into the City in the middle of the day, and under the cloak of business—the buying a few "Egyptians," an investment in "Kaffirs,"—would decoy Arthur out to lunch with her.

Of course, her investments, transacted through his firm, brought him both commission and credit, for they were always large. But he loathed the task she imposed upon him, and himself for the part he brought himself to play.

"Ah, truant, I have seen nothing of you for nearly a week," she said smilingly as she nestled down into a low easy-chair. "You were not in the City yesterday."

"No, I—I—have been unwell these last few days, and have had a week's rest."

"But you are recovered now?" she said quickly, leaning forward, her elbows on her knees and her face supported by her hands.

She was a decidedly and wonderfully fascinating woman. Forty? Yes. Fair and fat? No. Spare rather was she, and with large dark eyes, which under excitement glowed like coals of fire.

"Oh, yes, I'm all right now, thanks. And you?"

"Only so-so. But I've not asked you to come and see me in order that we may talk doctor's shop. Mr. Brereton, I am going to ask you an apparently impertinent question."

"That is an impossibility," he remarked.

"You think so? Well, it is for you to decide that point." She paused a moment, and then said suddenly: "Would you care to increase your income were the opportunity offered you?"

"I—I don't understand," he replied a little nervously. He half-fared from this preamble a definite declaration and a proffer of the widow's hand and—bank balance.

"No, but would you, could it be done in a business-like, practical way?"

"I should wish first to hear the way," he said, bending his head slightly.

To his astonishment she told him—he imagined the fact to be known only to his employers and to himself—that his firm were prepared to admit him into partnership provided that he could bring into the concern capital to the amount of £10,000. To his further wonderment the widow, if he would so agree, proposed to advance the sum for that purpose.

He could see by the glitter in her eyes and by the restless interlacing movement of her fingers that for her much depended upon his answer. However, he could not bring himself to a decision there and at once. He told her so, and she had perforce to be content with the crumbs of hope.

He left her, promising that on the following day he would communicate to her the result of his consideration of her generous offer. He thanked her, thanked her

warmly, and reached his own rooms in no enviable state of mind.

Macpherson, Lyle, and Brereton have a large "deal," on hand for Fulvia Masters. It is observable that the widow is of late moody, reserved, irritable even.

Six months ago, when Arthur Brereton joined the great Caphall Court firm as junior partner, she for a brief while was radiant. But the brightness visibly dimmed day by day, until now she seemed to have virtually changed places with the object of her erstwhile admiration.

It was on this wise. Edie Drew, a niece of Mrs. Masters' dead husband, came to stay with her. This was about three months after Arthur's promotion. The girl was a charming little creature, a contrast in every way to her aunt, being fair and gentle, where the other, as befitted her brunette type of feature, was alike masterful and unsympathetic.

Arthur Brereton met her for the first time in her aunt's presence, and the latter, keen to note the drift of things where the young fellow was concerned, saw that he was not a little impressed. This decided her to curtail the visit of the young lady, who on her part was not by any means disposed to fall in with her aunt's views.

The young people, as if by instinct, refrained from any expression of mutual interest while actually under Mrs. Masters' roof; but as "love laughs at locksmiths"—or at any rate, they say so—so does he usually snap his fingers at the precautionary measures, ordinary and extraordinary, of guardians and duennas.

It was on the morning of the "deal" referred to that an apparently accidental early meeting by the rhododendron clumps in Hyde Park led to a confession and an engagement. The fact that Edie was returning that day to her Yorkshire home no doubt quickened Arthur's movements, and hurried him, perhaps a little prematurely, into the irrevocable.

It was when Edie told him how that she should certainly inform her aunt before leaving London of her engagement that Arthur saw trouble ahead. He knew, or at least shrewdly suspected, the jealous nature of Fulvia Masters, and the knowledge or suspicion, added to a twinge of conscience with regard to his own conduct, as being, so to speak, not altogether of the strictly straightforward order, rendered him now uneasy and anxious.

About three o'clock in the afternoon of the same day Mrs. Master's card was brought in to him. Having all necessary instructions with regard to the business to be done by them for her that day, he was not a little surprised at this visit; in fact, in the light of a recent personal event, he was vaguely apprehensive.

He was roused to attention by the sharp clicking of the closed door. As he sat, leaning slightly over his writing-table, she towered above him. She was an exceptionally tall woman.

"Arthur Brereton," and there was a dangerous light in her eyes, an ugly contraction of brow, prophetic of storm and trouble: "have I deserved that you should strike at me in this way—this mean, sneaking, under-handed way? Don't interrupt me, please." He had half-risen as if to expostulate with her. "I have not much to say, but that little will, I think, be to the point and soon said."

"Mrs. Masters," he here succeeded in saying, "do not, I beg of you, hastily utter anything that will make our

future friendship impossible. But will you not be seated?"

"No, sir, I will not be seated. Our friendship!" she added with fine scorn. "It has never, at least upon your side, been worth so much that its loss is to be regretted. Oh, I will not occupy your valuable time longer than a few moments, I assure you," seeing that he looked nervously at his watch. "You have this morning entered into an engagement with Edie Drew."

He silently inclined his head.

"Yes, she has told me. I may not blame her; she is her own mistress. But you!" And here her cheeks broke out aflame, although she drew up her figure to its full height. "You! But there; do you remember that summer evening, sir, at Taplow? But a man's memory is like the summer itself, gone before its coming can be realised. Woman's is as her life."

"Mrs. Masters, I am quite prepared to justify my action in the matter of my engagement to Edie, and if I have said or done amiss in—with—"

"If!" she said with barely suppressed anger. "If is but a little word, but it may kill, Arthur Brereton, it may kill."

She moved to the door, placing her hand upon the handle, and half turning towards him.

"We shall never meet again," she said, "never. But you—you will both hear and know."

She was gone, and the door closed behind her.

Passing the house in Phillimore Place shortly after he saw that it was shut up. On inquiry he found that Fulvia Masters had gone abroad for an indefinite period.

Then, one morning, he received a letter from Edie saying that her aunt had died suddenly. The English doctor at Interlaken had written describing the rapid decline into which she had fallen, and forwarding, by virtue of her last request, various documents to her lawyer in London.

Among the papers was her will, executed evidently prior to her leaving England, as it was witnessed by two of her servants, who had remained in charge of the Phillimore Place house.

The strangest thing about it, however, was a legacy left to Edith Drew. A large sum of money, and, so the will ran, "one certain pint bottle of rare old Malaga wine, with a 'yellow seal,' the same not to be opened until the wedding-day of the said Edith Helen Drew, and then the liquor to be drunk by bride and bridegroom to my memory."

"Oddest thing I ever heard in my life," said Tommy Singleton to his friend the evening before the wedding. Tommy was to be best man. "The old woman," he continued, "must have got a bit 'wobbly' in the top storey, I should say. But is there any penalty attached to the non-fulfilment of the bottle business?"

"Yes," replied the other. "In the event of the bottle being opened before the time specified, or of a refusal to drink the wine at all, the money otherwise bequeathed to Edie goes to the Hospital for Incurables."

"Where the old lady ought certainly to have been herself. Of course there will be a witness to the due performance of the conditions?"

"Oh, yes, old Shiel, her lawyer, will be at the table to give his attestation."

"Ah!... And the bottle—where is it now?"

"It is in the charge of Edie's father, as one of the executors."

"Oh—um—I think I'll go for a stroll, Arthur. See you in good time to-morrow morning. Good-night, my expiring bachelor."

When Tommy Singleton requested at half-past eleven an interview with Mr. Drew at 51 Eccleston Square, that gentleman expressed considerable surprise, but when he learnt the object of his visitor's somewhat untimely call, he grew first interested and then alarmed. At the end of half-an-hour Tommy departed with a small brown paper parcel under his arm.

The wedding-day dawned dull and showery, but Tommy burst into his friend's room with all his usual mercuriality of spirit. There is nothing of any moment to chronicle in connection with the ceremony. It was just the old thing over again—flowers, millinery, and tears—save that, perhaps, the bride, at all events in the groom's eyes, was more than passing sweet.

It was at the conclusion of the breakfast speeches that Mr. Shiel rose, and after reciting the clause of the will relating to the bottle with the yellow seal, requested Mr. Drew, as its custodian, to produce it.

The little, insignificant-looking glass receptacle was handed by that gentleman to the butler, who, solemnly breaking the seal and drawing the cork, poured the contents into two wine-glasses standing ready upon a large silver salver.

At the moment that Brereton uttered the words: "To the memory of Fulvia Masters," he caught Tommy Singleton's eye. He had never seen his friend's face so serious before, and yet there was in it a strange look of triumphant thankfulness.

There is a certain analytical chemist in the North of London, Tommy Singleton's brother, to wit. In his laboratory, upon the topmost shelf in a dark cupboard, is an empty wine-bottle, the cork, topped with a yellow seal, being half drawn.

The scientist will tell you that the bottle at one time contained a prussic acid decoction, and that through the detective ability of Tommy Singleton two lives dear to him were saved, and a jealous woman's after-death-revenge frustrated.

How one bottle was substituted for the other is a secret between Tommy and Mr. Drew.

RALPH ENDERBY.

HOW TO WIN KRUGER'S HAT.

November 26th Your Last Chance.

Don't you think it would look nice on your drawing-room table, or under a glass case on your mantel-piece? Well, there is no reason whatever why you should not get it. As you probably know, the Editor of *Pearson's Weekly* has bought it, and is offering it as a prize in a simple competition. All you have to do is to send in what you consider the funniest joke you ever heard. It may be either out from a paper or written up by yourself. In either case you must affix to it a coupon which will be found in the current number of *Pearson's Weekly*.

PEARSON'S WEEKLY

FOOTBALL SKILL COMPETITION

£100 PRIZE AWARDED EVERY WEEK.

Result of Competition No. 4.—ONE WINNER GETS THE £100 THIS WEEK.

The £100 this week has been won by Mr. A. E. BARKER, 30 Gloucester Street, Coventry, who sent in the correct results to all the matches.

Sheffield United, Wolverhampton Wanderers, Sheffield Wednesday, Notts Forest, Derby County, Newcastle United, and Southampton won their matches. Swindon v Reading was scratched. The remainder were drawn games.

The football matches named below will be played on Saturday, November 24th. To the competitor from whom we receive the correct result of all these matches we will pay the sum of ONE HUNDRED POUNDS. If no competitor gives all the results correctly, the HUNDRED POUNDS will be awarded to the person or persons most nearly correct.

FOOTBALL COUPON No. 7. Matches to be played on Saturday, November 24th.

MATCHES TO BE PLAYED ON SATURDAY, NOV. 24TH.	Free	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18
1 NOTTS FOREST v.																			
2 NOTTS COUNTY.....																			
1 SHEFFIELD UNIT D.V.																			
2 ASTON VILLA.....																			
1 BLACKBURN ROVERS v.																			
2 BOLTON WANDERERS.....																			
1 NEWCASTLE UNITED v.																			
2 LIVERPOOL.....																			
1 STOKE v.																			
2 DERBY COUNTY.....																			
1 WEST BROMWICH ALB. v.																			
2 SUNDERLAND.....																			
1 MANCHESTER CITY v.																			
2 WOLVERHAMPTON WEND.																			
1 WOOLWICH ARSENAL v.																			
2 MIDDLESBROUGH.....																			
1 WALSALL v.																			
2 LEICESTER FOSSE.....																			
1 SOUTHAMPTON v.....																			
2 BRISTOL CITY.....																			

The clubs engaged in each match are numbered 1 and 2. To fill in the above coupon, insert in the space provided the number of the club selected to win. To predict a draw, put X. THE FIRST COUPON IS FREE. A penny stamp must be inclosed for each coupon used in addition to the free one. Nine extra coupons may be used for Sixpence, and eighteen extra coupons for One Shilling.

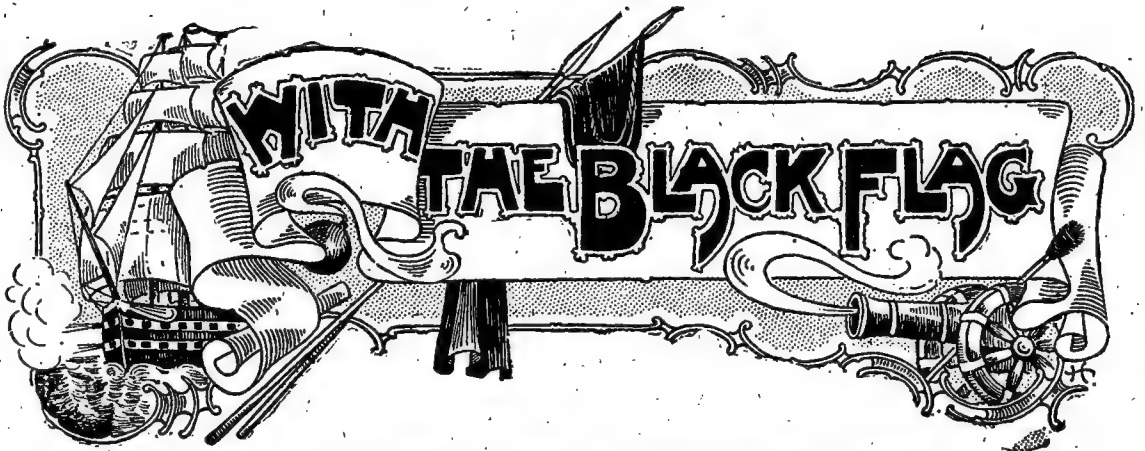
I send in this coupon as a competitor for the prize advertised in this paper, and subject to the conditions printed on this page:

Name and address.....

THINGS TO REMEMBER.

1. Coupons may be sent either from "Pearson's Weekly" or "Short Stories."
2. All coupons must reach us not later than Friday, November 23rd, first post.
3. Competitors should cut out the whole coupon, score it as directed, put their name and address in the space provided, and send to "COUPON No. 7," Pearson's Buildings, Henrietta Street, London, W.C.
4. All coupons are at senders' risk, and if they go astray, from whatever cause, we do not accept responsibility.
5. Competitors must attach their private address to their attempts. No prize will be sent to any post-office, refreshment rooms, or other places at which letters are called for. Attempts bearing such addresses will be disqualified.
6. In the event of a tie the prize will be divided.
7. Competitors may send in any number of attempts.
8. It must be taken as a condition of the competition that anybody competing therein agrees to abide by the Editor's final decision.

Intending competitors in the above would do well to procure a copy of "The Football Who's Who," which contains valuable information and statistics showing the previous records of the various clubs, and the particulars of the points of about a thousand of the best known players. This book will be found of great service in determining the chances of the teams engaged. It only costs a shilling, and may be obtained of a bookseller, and post free for 1s. 3d. from the Publisher, 17 Henrietta Street, London, W.C.



A ROMANCE OF LAND AND SEA.

BY WILLIAM WESTALL.

Author of "With the Red Eagle," "The Phantom City," "Nigel Fortescue," etc., etc.

PRINCIPAL CHARACTERS.

Major Wyvenhoe, commander of an expedition which went out from England to help the Venezuelans in their struggle for liberty.

Captain Cautley, who is in charge of the ship which took the expedition out.

John Ready, the servant of Wyvenhoe.

General Ariemendez, ex-Governor of Pampatar and Vice-President of the Venezuelan Republic.

Don Iago Santleo, a friend of Wyvenhoe.

General Urdenetta, Governor of Pampatar, a bitter enemy of Wyvenhoe.

Bolívar, Supreme Chief of the Venezuelan Republic.

Tamanac, an Indian Cacique, and great friend of Santleo.

Master Wyvenhoe, the leading man at Manoa.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE DESTRUCTION OF MANOA.

"ROSALIND! Rosalind!"

"Your father," I said, and going towards the house we presently met him.

"I have news for thee, lass," he exclaimed, laughing ironically.

"News for me! What is it, father?" she asked.

"Would'st like to be wed?"

"Would I like to be wed? You are pleased to make merry, father," rejoined Rosalind, regarding him with wondering eyes.

"Nay, it is too serious a matter to make merry over. A man would take thee to wife."

Rosalind and I exchanged glances.

"Could the judge have overheard us, or was it some other man?"

"Who is the man?" she inquired dubiously.

"Antony Goring. Nobody else. Stephen Parker hath just been here with a proposal from Antony's father, who, as thou knowest, is my bitterest enemy. Thou hast found favour in Antony's eyes, and if I give thee to him it will be a healing of all differences, and I shall have no further trouble. What sayest thou?"

"With your leave, sir, I will answer for Rosalind," I struck in. "Master Antony Goring has spoken too late. I have just asked her to be my wife, to which she has given her consent, and we were coming to ask yours."

"You, you have asked Rosalind!" cried the judge, now as much surprised as we had been. "A simple moun-

tain maid, unlearned, knowing naught of the world to which you belong, is no fit mate for you, kinsman."

"That is my concern, judge. It is enough that we love each other, and the very fact that she is neither a woman of the world nor a worldly woman makes me love her all the more. May we hope for your consent?"

"Yea, verily, and I give it with all my heart, kinsman, knowing that you will make our Rosalind a good husband, and esteeming it a privilege to be still more your kinsman. Moreover, this will be a fitting answer for Antony Goring. I told Master Parker that I would as lief see Rosalind dead at my feet as the wife of one whose soul is as foul as his face. But Stephen being a wise man he counselled me to send a message less likely to stir up further strife, so I bade him say that I would consider the matter, and speak to my daughter. Now it will be enough to answer that as she is betrothed to Master Rupert Wyvenhoe I cannot gainsay her."

Rosalind's eyes filled with tears.

"I thank you my father; your kindness fills the cup of my happiness to overflowing," she exclaimed joyfully, putting her arms round his neck and kissing him.

"Mine also," said I. "I was your debtor already, now I am more your debtor than ever, and I have still another favour to ask. As you know, my home is in England—"

"And you want to take Rosalind thither. It will nearly break our hearts to part with her, and she will be loth to leave us. But that is far off, you will abide with us yet a long while. Nay, I am no Laban; I don't ask you to serve for Rosalind as Jacob served for Rachel. The sooner you marry the better I shall be pleased, so as to let Master Antony know of a surety that the prize he would win can never be his."

"It cannot be too soon for me. What say you, Rosalind? When shall it be?"

"Nay, kinsman, you are my master now, it is for you—when you and my father will."

"Your sweetheart, darling, not your master, and call me no longer kinsman, say Rupert."

"May I? Would it please you?"

"Much."

"Then I shall always call you Rupert."

"I do not know what is the custom here, but in England it is the bride's privilege to name the day. Had you not better speak to your mother?"

"Yes, that would be best. Hie thee to thy mother, child

"Make the time when you will, only let it be short," said the judge.

"She is young and artless, and as innocent as an angel; for which she is perhaps none the worse," he added when Rosalind was gone.

"For which she is all the more precious. I am very fortunate and you are very kind, and for the present I shall say nothing about taking her away, only I must not trespass too long on your hospitality—"

"No more of that, an you love me, Rupert. You will only be a child the more, and my barns are full and my house hath many rooms. Ah, Master Antony will get an answer he little expects."

"I hope the rebuff you are going to give him will not add to your difficulties. If looks go for anything he is likely to be a dangerous enemy."

"He looks everything that is bad, the red-skinned knave, and I am sure of one thing, he would give me more trouble as a son-in-law than an enemy, and he and his people are enemies already. But never fear, ere long I shall master them all."

I hoped the event would justify the judge's confidence, though I had misgivings. About the earthquake shock, and the pillar of smoke, for as such I deemed them, he said never a word.

I had not expected that he would, but it did surprise me that these portentous signs were ignored by everybody else, even by Santley, from which I could only conclude that they had either become contemptible by long familiarity, or that Maneros were perversely blind to portents, possibly from ignorance, which any other people would have regarded with apprehension and dread.

But as it was not for me to sound a note of alarm I held my peace, resolving, however, to take Rosalind from the mountain so soon as I could do so without giving umbrage to her kinsfolk.

Mistress Wyvenhoe and her daughters decided that the marriage should take place a month after the betrothal. And then something else happened.

I had noticed for some time that Santley and Diana were very friendly. My declaration emboldened him to make his, which met with acceptance from all quarters, and it was arranged for both weddings to take place on the same day.

In England this would have seemed undue haste. At Manoa it was nothing unusual. There were neither settlements to make nor trousseaux to prepare. The girls' outfits had been in preparation since their childhood, and it was very little Rosalind would be able to take away with her.

The judge dowered his daughters with gold and I was surprised by its amount and value. It was mostly in the shape of trinkets—bracelets, brooches, chains, rings and other baubles.

There were also some ancient Spanish coins, obtained I know not whence, and several ingots. The rings were of certain specified weights, and passed on occasion as coin, since though it pleased Master Wyvenhoe to say, and in a certain sense, truly, that they had neither money nor mints at Manoa, tokens of value, albeit not officially recognised, had long been in vogue and were found useful.

The judge's liberality was opportune and relieved me of an anxiety. My own funds were so low that they had not sufficed for our travelling expenses to the coast and the voyage to England, and it was to the last degree improbable that I should find anybody in Bolivia or Peru to whom I could sell a draft on London.

Nothing of moment befell in the interval between our betrothal and the weddings.

When my rival got his answer he was very angry, used bad language and vowed vengeance against both the judge and myself. But the judge only laughed, saying that people who threatened vengeance seldom executed it, and that Master Goring was too much of a cur to dare to raise his hand either against him or Master Rupert. Which I

have no doubt was reported to Antony and added fuel to the fire. But I was too happy and too much taken up with my sweetheart to let his threats trouble me.

Even my forebodings as to the fate of the mountain, in



"You, you have asked Rosalind!" cried the judge now as much surprised as we had been.

the event of a serious earthquake happening and Mount Lofty becoming an active volcano, were almost forgotten, though I did once broach the subject to Santley. He saw no cause for alarm.

The tremblings had been going on ever since his grandfather could remember, and were so frequent that nobody noticed them. Lofty did not smoke. What I imagined to be smoke was merely a dark cloud hovering over the summit. Smoke and clouds were so much alike that they might easily be mistaken for each other.

Santley spoke so confidently that I did not care to argue the point, though I still held to the opinion that what I had seen was smoke, and what I had felt were small earthquakes.

The betrothal of the judge's daughters was a notable event at Manoa and excited general interest. He was the first man on the mountain and greatly respected as well by reason of his personal qualities as his official position.

The good wishes he received were numerous and hearty, his waning popularity revived, whereby his friends were encouraged and his opponents so much discouraged that they almost ceased opposing. All of which vastly delighted him.

"The very thing. We wanted something to unite us. This double marriage will do it, and we shall have the finest wedding feast that was ever known at Manoa," he exclaimed.

Everybody in the village, except the Gorings and their clique, and many from other parts of the mountain were invited and regaled with the best their Master and Mistress could give them. He himself, as Chief Magistrate, per-

formed the ceremony and presented each of the brides with a marriage certificate drawn up in proper form.

Then there was a banquet, at which Santley and myself had to make speeches, and to the banquet followed a fandango that lasted till past midnight, a very late hour on the mountain. Never, I think, was a more joyous party, the guests were all gayety and good humour, and danced as though they might never dance again, and poor souls they never did.

Truly, and without exaggeration, this was the happiest day of my life. It was happiness to know that Rosalind was mine, to see her smiling face and look into her glowing eyes, to join in the dancing and mingle with the guests as they strolled in the grounds, hear their merry laughter and receive their kindly greetings.

Yet so overshadowed is that day by terrible memories that I can never think of it without a sense of horror and a sinking of the heart.

We were to spend our honeymoon at home for the very sufficient reason that, short of camping out, we could not well spend it anywhere else. Nevertheless, we meant to make a few excursions, the first, in company with Santley and his wife, to the lake that fed the river; but as this would involve an early start and a long climb, the lake being considerably higher than Manoa, we decided not to set out until the day but one after the wedding.

Arrangements were made accordingly, the mules selected, provisions prepared, and the servants who were to accompany us, including John Ready, bidden to be ready betimes.

After supper the judge proposed that he and I should take a turn in the garden, which we did, leaving Rosalind and her mother in the verandah.

"My daughters have ever been dear to me, but it is only now when they have taken to themselves husbands that I

know how dear they are, and how much I shall miss them. Diana will always be near us. But Rosalind. You will not take away the child very soon, Rupert," he said anxiously.

"Not soon at all," I returned. "Not for ever so long. Only my friends, with whom I have not been able to communicate for months, will think I am dead, and if there were any possibility of sending a letter——"

"If that will content you it shall be done. Tamanao is a great traveller, can find his way any whither, and likes wandering. He will take your letter to Choco, or some other place on the coast, and by hook or by crook get it dispatched to England. Then you will not think of going before the end of this year?"

"I won't think of going before the end of this year, at the soonest."

"I thank you, my son, for your complaisance, and the matter being for the present settled we will say no more about it. Sufficient for the day is the evil—oh, Heavens!"

The judge gave a spasmodic bound and lurched heavily forward. In trying to save him I slipped and we both went down. An arrow had pierced his back, and as I fell a second arrow whizzed over my head, and stuck in a tree a few paces in front of us.

I rested the stricken man's head on my shoulder and called for help, on which Ready, who was near, came running.

"He is surely not mortally wounded, John?" I cried.

"Judge Wyvenhoe will never speak again, sir," answered John, looking at his face; "this arrow has pierced his heart."

Just then Rosalind and her mother, who had heard my call, also came running. They had no need to ask what had happened. The prostrate body, the ghastly face, the murderous arrow, told their tale only too well.

I shall not attempt to describe the scene that followed. It was one of the most painful experiences of my life.

When the body had been taken into the house Ready and I tried to track the murderer but it was too late, the light had failed, and there was so much cover about that he had every chance of getting away unseen.

Soon, Santley and several friends of the family came, all in consternation and, save Santley, in utter bewilderment. Nobody had a doubt as to the identity of the murderer.

"Antony Goring hath done this," was in all their mouths. Yet nobody proposed to do anything. The judge had kept matters so entirely in his own hands, that now he was gone the whole community appeared to be paralysed. Moreover, this was the first murder ever committed in Manoa, and there existed no machinery for dealing with so terrible a crime.

I urged Santley to take action.

"What would you have me do?" he asked.

"Arrest Antony Goring and charge him with the crime."

"He would deny it, and we have no evidence against him. Also he is protected by a strong party, resolutely led; our leader is dead, and there is none to take his place. The deputy-judges are old men and too timid to move a hand. The council will meet to-morrow, perhaps to-night, to elect a



To the banquet followed a fandango, which lasted till midnight.

new judge who is sure to be Walter Goring. Only by force can it be prevented."

"I would use force then."

"If we can command it, which I doubt. I will make inquiries and consult with our friends."

In warm climates the interval between death and burial is of the shortest, and on the next day Master Wyvenhoe's body was followed to the grave by nearly all the village and interred with the forms usual at Manoa, which included a religious service led by one of the late judge's oldest friends.

After the funeral we had a family conference. In Santley's opinion there was no possibility of bringing the murderer to justice. Walter Goring, who had been elected judge, and several members of the council were, he believed, implicated in the crime, and would set their faces against any attempt to open an inquiry; moreover, their party was united and resolute, ours dispirited and disorganised. Some of them had already gone over to the enemy, and the people at large were too easy going to take up arms even in order to avenge the death of one who had devoted his life to their service.

"So nothing can be done?" I asked.

"At present, nothing. Later on, perhaps, we may find a leader, reunite our party and oust the Gorings. But that will take time, and though I am sorry to say it, my friend, you must go now."

"Go! What for?"

"Because if you don't you are likely to be held fast here, so long as you live. Those who opposed your coming are now in power, and for the same reason as they opposed your coming will forbid your going. They say that no stranger can be trusted to keep secret Manoa's history and whereabouts, on the preservation of which depends its prosperity and independence, if not its existence."

"When would you have me go?"

"This night."

"Nay, that would be too much like running away."

"It must be as James says, Rupert," interposed Rosalind with a peremptoriness which surprised me. "Delays are dangerous, that second arrow was meant for you, Antony Goring hath other arrows in his quiver, and there is no guarding against foes who lie in ambush and shoot you in the back."

This settled the matter, Rosalind was willing to go, and after what had happened I felt no desire to prolong my sojourn in Manoa.

"To-night you may get away without difficulty, nobody will suspect you of a design to leave so soon after the poor judge's death," observed Santley. "Later, even to-morrow, there might be obstacles. Diana and I will set you a day's journey on the way. We must make our preparations swiftly and secretly. Instead of taking your letter to the coast, Tamanac will guide you thither."

"May I not go too, James?" asked Beatrice.

"And leave your mother?"

"Let us all be together till the last moment; we will both go," said Mistress Wyvenhoe.

"I see no objection, it will be only two mules the more; and you and Beatrice would be very desolate, left here by yourselves after parting with Rosalind."

And so it was arranged. Tamanac, whose comings and goings were not regarded, and a servant whom we could trust, started with four pack mules when it was dusk. They were to wait for us at the rest house, near the foot of the ladders, where the Cazique would obtain two additional mules and load them with provisions.

We others did not set out till past eleven, which at Manoa was almost the middle of the sleeping night. Rosalind and I took with us only such things as were necessary for the journey, including of course her golden

dower, the value of which I estimated at upwards of three thousand pounds sterling.

Santley led the way, and John Ready brought up the rear. Our unshod mules made no noise, nobody crossed



I rested the stricken man's head on my shoulder.

our path, we went steadily on, and at four o'clock reached the rest house, where we found Tamanac and had breakfast.

"How if we are followed?" I asked Santley.

"Our flight won't be known for two or three hours. It will take at least one to organise a pursuit, and with a start of eight we shall not easily be overtaken."

"You forget the ladders."

"No I don't. The topmost ladder was lifted an hour before we set out, and cannot be replaced for at least three days."

(To be concluded next week.)

In the Christmas Double Number of

SHORT STORIES

will appear the first of a series of articles entitled

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SHORT STORIES ABOUT TELEGRAMS.

We devote, every week, two pages of *Short Stories* to pithy, humorous anecdotes similar to those which appear in these columns. A prize of £1 is. will be sent to the reader who submits the best storyette this week, and a copy of "The Knight of King's Guard," by Ewan Martin, to each of those whose attempts are used. The anecdotes may be either original or selected; in the latter case the source must be stated. The prize of One Guinea offered for the best Storyette in this competition has been won this week by Mr. E. C. Lempriere, 22 Seymour Road, Harringay, N. Attempts this week must deal with Stories about ELEPHANTS, and must reach the Storyette Editor, *Short Stories* Office, Henrietta Street, Strand, London, W.C., by Monday, November 26th. Post-cards only, please.

A Little Misunderstanding.

SHE was reclining in a low chair in the drawing-room, thinking about her dear Willie, who had been legally her property for the space of three months, when a telegram arrived for her. Hurriedly tearing open the buff envelope she scanned the contents, then fell back in a swoon.

The message was from her brother in the city, and read:

"Will run over to-day—George."

Her maid at last restored her to consciousness. Her Willie run over! She could not grasp the full significance of it. One thing she would do—go to him at once; so she hastily attired herself, and at length reached her brother's office, who, having sent the news, would be able to tell her all about it.

"How is he, and where have they taken him?" Her brother stared at her stupidly. "Oh, don't keep me in suspense! Tell me where he is!"

"Where who is?"

"Why, Willie."

"At his office, I presume. I haven't seen him to-day."

"Then what does this mean? Isn't he run over? Is this one of your silly jokes?"

George took the flimsy from his sister, read his own message, then exploded with laughter. It was a long time before he could convince her that his simple intimation that he would run over and pay her a visit, was not a detestable practical joke.

E. C. L.

Tricking the Post Office.

SOME time ago a journalist went into a post-office to send a telegram and post a letter.

"Can't sell stamps now," said the clerk; "it's after hours."

"But this letter is very important," urged the journalist.

"This office is only open for telegraph business," said the clerk decidedly.

The journalist took a form, wrote a telegram—fourteen words—and handed the clerk sevenpence. The clerk gave him a sixpenny and a penny stamp, and the journalist calmly struck out the last two words on the form, stuck the sixpenny stamp on his telegram, and walked out of the office, affixing the penny stamp to his letter in doing so.

W. A. S. H.

The Wrong Lords.

THERE was a dinner in the Marlborough Rooms. The principal talk was about a certain bill.

"I wonder what the Lords have done?" said the chairman.

"I'll wire to the nearest club and ask," replied a well-known M.P.

So he sent the telegram, with a request that the latest news of the Lords' division should be sent to him.

This was the reply:—"Latest from Lords"—Australians, 150 for eight wickets. Trott not out."

J. B.

Impossible.

A PEEBLESHIRE worthy was about to get married. The marriage was to take place at the home of the bride-elect who resided at a village some distance from where William lived.

The eventful day having arrived, the prospective bridegroom started for the station. On the way, however, he was hailed by the village grocer, who entertained him so heartily that the end of it was William missed his train.

The grocer suggested sending a telegram, and at William's dictation wired as follows:

"Don't marry till I come.—William."

W. J. B.

They Knew it Wasn't My Writing.

FOR the past few years my summer holidays have been spent at Scarborough, and, as I usually stay at the same house every year, it has been my custom to secure apartments beforehand by letter.

This year I omitted to write until a couple of days only remained before my holidays began, and, fearing lest I should be too late by writing, I sent a "wire," telling them to reserve apartments for me as usual.

On arriving there, in due course, I was surprised to be told that the house was full, the rooms I used to occupy only having been engaged that very morning.

"But why did you let the rooms?" I demanded hotly, "when I had engaged them myself by telegram two days ago. Didn't you receive it?"

The good woman threw up her hands in horror as she exclaimed:

"Oh, sir, I am so sorry; but when your telegram came we thought someone was playing a trick on us, for both Betsy and myself agreed as how it wasn't in your own handwriting!"

Expostulations being useless, I had to find fresh quarters.

A. V.

Not What I Wanted.

A FRIEND of mine held a good position in the Zoological Gardens.

I had been out of a situation for some time, and he promised to let me know when a vacancy occurred that I might fill.

Imagine my feelings one morning when I received a telegram to the following effect:

"A vacancy in the monkey-house; come at once."

R. J.

A Matter of Punctuation.

MR. JONES had a country house, and had run up to town. On his return journey, the train came into collision, occasioning damage and delay. Mr. Jones was shaken, but not otherwise hurt. He got a friend to telegraph for him, which he did, to the following effect:

"Serious accident. Mr. Jones remains. Coming 8.30 p.m. train."

But the clerk transposed the message, thus:

"Serious accident. Mr. Jones' remains coming 8.30 p.m. train."

And when that unfortunate gentleman arrived, instead of finding his carriage, there was an undertaker with a hearse waiting to convey his remains to his sorrow-stricken family.

W. C. L.

Smartly Done.

THE other morning, whilst at breakfast, I received the following telegram:

"Come at once. Father very ill.—Mother."

Hastily finishing my meal, I hurried off to catch the train. When I arrived at my destination I met my father, who never looked better in his life, who greeted me with:

"Good morning, Tom. What brings you down here so early?"

At first I could hardly believe my senses. What was the meaning of the telegram? Was someone fooling me? It really looked like it. For reply I handed him the telegram, which I had fortunately brought with me.

"Someone has been having a bit of fun out of you," he said.

"Going a bit too far, I think," I exclaimed.

"Anyhow, if I were you," he said, "I would hurry back home as soon as possible, and see if anything turns up."

So hastily bidding him good-bye, without waiting to see my mother, as the train started in a few minutes, I returned home again. When I arrived there, I let myself in with my latch-key.

The house appeared to be deserted. I searched the lower rooms for my wife, but found, instead, that burglars had been in while I was away. They had taken all the silver they could lay hands on. A horrible feeling came over me. Had they killed my wife?

I called out aloud, but received no answer. I rushed upstairs, and, lying on the table in my wife's bedroom was a telegram from her sister, the contents of which were: "Mother very ill; wants to see you particularly. Come at once."

This was the solution of the mystery. The burglars had sent the telegrams, so that they could go on with their work unmolested.

About three o'clock my wife returned, and had prac-

tically the same tale to tell as I. She had got her telegram five minutes after I had left, and had hurried off at once, only to find her mother in the best of health.

The plans the burglars had laid had worked well. We are more careful now about telegrams.

E. L.

Misunderstood.

A CERTAIN man travelling in America had not enough money to reach his destination, so he went to the railway official and told him his friend had large shares in the company, and if he would telegraph to him he would let him have a pass.

The railway official did so, and received the following reply:

"Don't let Tom walk."

The official at once gave him a pass and he reached his destination and at once went to thank his friend.

The railway official soon after received the following telegram:

"You idiot, I said, 'Don't, let Tom walk,' and you gave him a pass."

E. H.

Only the Code.

DURING the early period of the last revolution in Peru, the leaders of the revolutionist party stayed in Chili, and directed the movement by means of the cable.

I was at the time in charge of an English business house in Lima. My rooms were over our office, and one night I was awakened by a loud rat-tat-tat on the iron-bound door below. I went out on to the balcony, which overhung the street, and to my amazement I found that the house was surrounded by soldiers.

"What do you want?" I shouted in Spanish.

"The head of the firm," was the reply.

I went down and admitted the officer—he was a full-blown general—and his aides. I wondered what I had done.

"Is this cablegram for your firm?" he asked.

I read it. There was one word, "*blindado*"—the Spanish for ironclad.

Then I roared with laughter.

The gold-laced general looked indignant.

"You will find it no laughing matter, señor, to plot against the government, and arrange for ironclads."

So I explained. I had ordered some goods from Chili, and this suspicious cablegram was merely to advise me that they had been shipped, "*blindado*" being the cipher word in the code book.

H. N. R.

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THE HEROISM OF "KID."

IN Lowchester Cathedral Choir School we once had a hero, and this is the story of his heroism.

He was a fragile little fellow with a white face and big blue eyes. His name was Kenneth Irencus Dalland; and, because the initials of his name spelt that derogatory monosyllable, he was always called "Kid"—always, that is, when he was not called "Miss Kitty" or "Saint Irencus"—for so innocent and quiet and simple he was, or seemed, that any one of those names appeared to suit him.

He was more "had on" than all the other kids in the school put together. Somehow he seemed to lend himself to it. He was so guileless and trustful, and believed everything the fellows told him. He it was who was dispatched to the Lodge at the Close Gate to ask the stout old janitor at what time the balloon might be expected to go up; he it was who was sent to the chemist's for two gallons of pickled canary seed; and it was he who was deputed to collect subscriptions from leading citizens on behalf of the "Lowchester Society for Relieving Aged and Deserving Beetles."

From these, and many like expeditions Kid always returned with the same expression of trustful good fellowship; and he joined, as heartily as anyone, in the laugh against himself. But sometimes when the dormitory was still, and the fellows asleep, he would have a good cry because they thought him such a simpleton.

The boy who took most delight in proving to the satisfaction of everyone the extreme greenness of Kid was a fellow named Pearson—the noisiest, jolliest, most reckless boy in the school—a boy with curly hair, eyes that were a-twinkle with fun, and a voice which seemed made for the merry music of laughter. Pearson used his wits—and they were of no mean order—in devising original methods of making Kid's innocence a cause of mirth, and his efforts were crowned with conspicuous success.

And yet Pearson was Kid's hero and special idol. In all Pearson's triumphs he rejoiced, and he suffered with Pearson in his moments of misfortune. Whenever Pearson underwent personal chastisement—which he did, on an average, six times in the week—Kid's big blue eyes would grow dim with sympathetic tears, and on one occasion he expended a month's savings on a pot of soothing ointment wherewith to salve the hero's wounded palms. But Pearson cared for none of these things; it was another, and more delicate, kindness which melted his heart.

It chanced one day that the mighty had indeed fallen. Pearson the intrepid, Pearson the mocker of Mr. Gardiner's lithe cane, was standing in a remote corner of the playground convulsed with sobs. He had returned from an interview with the master with reference to his latest and most daring escapade, in which that sorely tried man had resorted to new and unwelcome tactics.

He had not whacked Pearson, he had talked to him. He had made touching references to Pearson's mater, who was a widow, and to the sad condition of the half-yearly report which she was expecting. It was that

which got Pearson down, and he was having a dark hour of meditation and repentance.

At that moment Kid happened to cross the playground accompanied by another boy. He gave one pained glance at his hero; then, getting between his companion and Pearson's corner, he suddenly called the former's attention to some object on the school roof, and, his eyes being thus drawn from the contemplation of Pearson's fallen state, led him away.

Presently he returned alone. Pearson was standing in the centre of the playground. He came to Kid and shook him gently by the shoulder.

"Kid," he said, "you saw me blubbing just then?"

"Yes, Pearson," Kid replied.

"But Renshaw didn't?"

"No, Pearson."

"Kid," said Pearson, with lips a-tremble, "you're a brick! Some day I'll do as much for you."

About a fortnight later Pearson's opportunity came. Some repairs were to be done to the interior of the Cathedral, and the workmen had erected a scaffolding, the top of which rose higher than the triforium gallery. Pearson examined this structure critically as he passed out from service. He drew Kid aside.

"Look here, Kid," he said, "the chaps think you're a bit of a muff—got no pluck, and that sort of thing."

Kid nodded.

"I've done my share in making them think so," continued Pearson bluntly.

Kid nodded again.

"But I know you're not," said Pearson. "And you were jolly decent to me the other day; so, if you'll take your cue from me, I'll show the chaps what you are."

Kid was grateful, and there the matter dropped.

That evening after tea Pearson said in careless tones: "Say, you chaps, do you know what Kid and I are going to do to-morrow dinner-time?"

No one could guess.

"Well," continued Pearson, "you know that jolly big wooden thing they've rigged up in the nave. Kid and I are going right up to the top of it when the men are at dinner, and going to look over the side. It would be ripping," he concluded, with a lame attempt at explanation, "to have a bird's-eye view of the tombs and things in the nave. I'm taking Kid because he's the only chap I can trust not to funk. And see here," he added, "if any fellow comes grinning at us he'll get his head jolly well punched. We don't want all Lowchester hanging round." And he winked ostentatiously at Kid.

* * * * *

"It's all right," cried Pearson the next day as he and Kid passed into the Cathedral after morning school, "those chaps are all out on the road; there's no one about, and there's the ladder. Come on Kid; don't funk it!"

"I'm not funking it," said Kid quietly.

He looked at the scaffolding. The long upright supports held two platforms, one considerably lower than

the other, and the top of the ladder rested on the upper stage.

"Elders and betters first," said Pearson as he put his foot on the bottom rung of the ladder and began to ascend. "Follow me, Kid."

He ran lightly up the ladder, Kid following with a throbbing heart.

"Wh-whew!" cried Pearson, with a long whistle, as he stood at length on the top platform. "It's no end of a way up. No notion it was so high. Does it make you giddy, Kid?"

"N-no," said Kid, who now stood beside him, "I don't think so."

"It does me," said Pearson shortly.

"Then let's go down," cried Kid earnestly. "Do let's go down, Pearson!"

"Do you think I'm going to funk?" asked Pearson in a rather shaky voice. "Not me! Don't let's gas about it; I'm going to the end to have that bird's-eye view."

Without another word they walked to the end of the platform. Above them rose the vaulted roof; beneath them were the projecting, roughly-hewn planks of the lower platform, and beneath that—far beneath—the cold tiles of the nave floor.

"Now we've got to look over," said Pearson. "I'll look over first because I'm the biggest chap. Out of the way, Kid, let me come."

Kid held back and allowed Pearson to pass him. He was trembling a little, but his fear was not for himself. Pearson walked to the edge of the platform, his lips firm set. Not for the world would he have confessed how curiously his head was swimming and how loudly his heart was beating. Kid watched him as he advanced so near the edge that the toe of his boot was over the end of the platform, and deliberately looked over.

"There," he said, looking up again quickly, "I've done it. I said I would. But you'd better not, Kid, you—"

The end of the sentence was lost in a sudden shrill cry. Kid ran to the end of the plank, stretching out his hands. There was a dull thud, then a dead silence. The cold sweat stood in beads on Kid's brow, and a feeling of sickness nearly choked him. But in his heart there was no fear, only a great dread and a courage which drove away all thoughts of his own danger.

He stood where he was, and called Pearson's name in an agony. His voice echoed dully through the great hollow aisles, but there was no answer. He called again, and this time he fancied that he heard a groan just beneath him. He closed his eyes for a second, and whispered a prayer to the great Love who hears and heeds in the silence. Then, crouching cautiously on his hands and knees, he looked quickly down.

"Thank goodness!" he murmured, for there beneath him, on the projecting planks of the lower stage, lay Pearson, pale and huddled together, but alive. Kid paused a moment. The projecting portion of the lower platform upon which Pearson lay was immediately beneath him, about twice his own length below. But this lower platform was much narrower than the one on which he stood, and was altogether a frailer structure.

"The ladder," he thought, and hastened to it. But a glance showed that it was impossible for him to reach Pearson by that means, for the ladder, resting on the top stage, was useless for the lower and narrower planking below.

Kid slowly returned. He sat down on the edge of the upper platform with his legs dangling down. If he was

to reach Pearson he must jump, and jump with care. To misjudge his leap would be—he cared not to think what. Slowly he lowered himself over the edge of the platform, clinging tightly to it. He hung by his hands over the lower scaffolding.

For a second he hung so; then, loosening his hold suddenly, allowed himself to drop. He alighted with a bang, and the shock sent him forward on his hands and knees. He scrambled up, and, kneeling beside his friend, called him by name. Pearson's eyes were closed and his face was colourless, but his breath came warm on Kid's hand. Presently he opened his eyes, and drew a long breath.

"Halloa, Kid," he said slowly, "where am I? Yes, I remember. Say, Kid, I can't move. There's something up with my leg. I was a cad to bring you here, Kid. Forgive a fellow, won't you?"

His eyes closed again. Kid was bending over him when he became aware of a new and terrible danger. The projection upon which they were crouching gave a great crack, and Kid felt it tremble. Then he saw that the planking was a fragile structure, joined for some temporary purpose to the firmer fabric beyond. There was another crack, then another, and another, and he knew that their support was giving way beneath their weight.

Then there came to Kid a great courage and a great determination. Stooping low, he seized both Pearson's listless hands, and drew them across his own shoulders. He looked neither up nor down—he fixed his eyes straight before him. The terrible silence of the great place lay solemn all about him. Raising himself to his full height, and putting forth all his strength, he moved slowly forward step after step across the narrow creaking planking, bearing Pearson, half dragged, half carried, with him.

Once he slipped and nearly fell; once he gave a little cry as the terror of danger swept across his mind. Then he set his lips and panted on till he gently laid his burden on the safe, though narrow, platform which was his goal. Then, throwing himself down by Pearson's side, he sobbed as though his heart would break.

Next moment there was a short, ominous crack, and the fragile planking upon which a moment before they had been went hurtling down with a rattling crash upon the tiles of the Cathedral floor. Kid put his arm round Pearson's neck and shuddered.

Then the workmen, returning at a later hour, found them; and, a ladder being directed to the lower scaffolding, strong arms bore Pearson safely down, Kid following with a white, grave face.

* * * * *

Pearson lay in bed with his leg in splints, and Kid sat by his side. Pearson was holding Kid's hand in his.

"Kid," he said suddenly, "you're a brick! You saved my life, Kid. I—"

"Chuck it, Pearson!" said Kid.

There followed a long silence.

"I'm always getting into some mess," said Pearson at length. "I wonder what the mater thinks; she—"

The door opened, and a lady in black stood on the threshold. She went quickly to the bed, and stroked Pearson's curly hair from his brow.

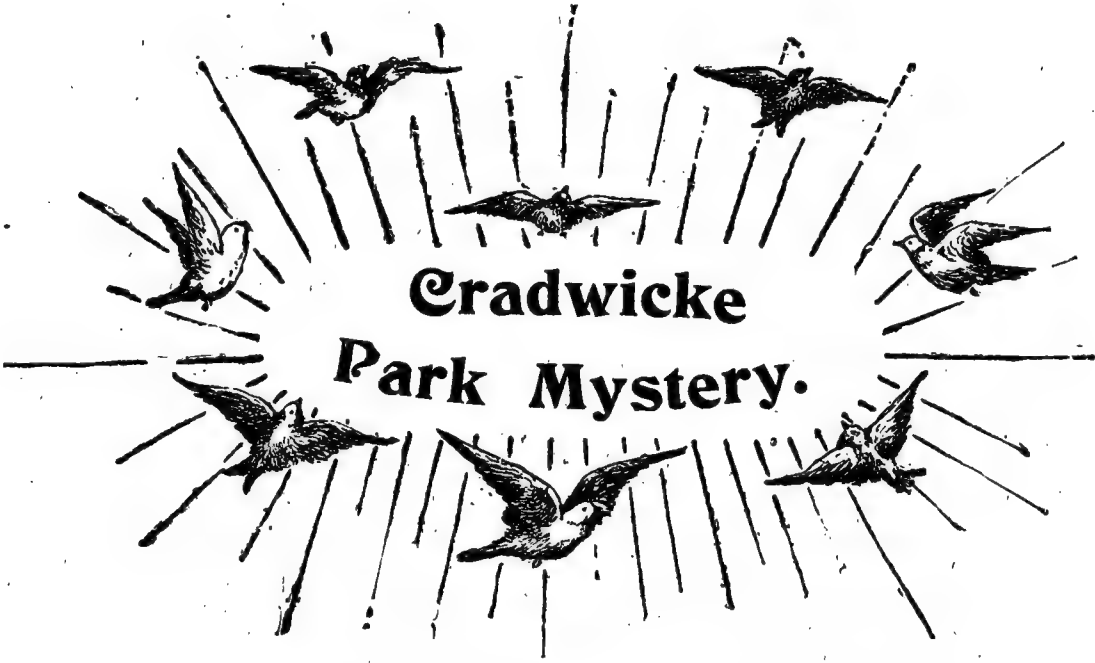
"Mater!"

"My dear boy!"

Kid softly left the room, closing the door behind him.

"I'm his chum," he said to himself, "but she's his mater."

SPENCER J. GIBB.



Cradwicke Park Mystery.

THE death of Mrs. Upton of Cradwicke Park was a shock to the whole of the district for miles round, and its mysterious character caused it to be a source of wonder and a topic of conversation for much longer than the proverbial nine days.

She was a young woman, not more than twenty-five, and had been married only a few months at the time of her death. Cradwicke Park was hers in her own right; her father had possessed two estates, and when he died he left one to his daughter and the other to his son. Miss Cradwicke had married Richard Upton, a young man from the next county; he had no property of his own, and the marriage was a "fine thing" for him, as other people were ungracious enough to say. The union was regarded as a love match at first, although there had been rumours of disagreements during the last two months.

As to Richard Upton, there was nothing said against him; he was a pleasant kind of young man and had contrived to win the favour of his neighbours.

Mr. Richard Upton went to London for a week. He had only been gone a few days when his wife disappeared. Search was made, but without result, and Mr. Upton was telegraphed for at the address where he was known to be lodging.

He responded immediately and returned by the first train, which started within forty minutes from the time he received the telegram. Further search was instituted and inquiry was made for miles round, and the little river was dragged; then it occurred to somebody that there were certain unfrequented parts of the Park itself which had not been explored.

In one of these out-of-the-way spots, Mrs. Upton's body was found. No one had anticipated that she might have met her death within the bounds of her own estate; the servants had stated that she had left the house with her hat and jacket on, and it was concluded that she was going to call on some of the poor people, as she occasionally did.

There was an inquiry into the cause of her death. The first examination simply revealed a severe scratch on the leg just above the ankle—such a scratch as might be caused by a thorn while scrambling through a hedge, but the loss of blood was so small that this could not for a moment be looked upon as the cause of death. The post-mortem examination threw a little more light on the matter, but it served to make the death proportionately more mysterious. There were traces of poison.

Closer search among the grass and twigs near the spot where the body was found resulted in the discovery of a small phial without a label; the husband admitted that there had been a dispute between them and that his wife, in a fit of anger, had threatened to take her life; but he added that he regarded this as merely an outburst of temper.

There was a difference of opinion, however, between the experts who made the usual analysis; it was pointed out that Mrs. Upton had been dead two days before her body was found, and that, in the ordinary course of decomposition, certain poisons are generated.

Had Mrs. Upton committed suicide or no? In the end, the jury decided upon a verdict to the effect that she had been found dead and that there was not sufficient evidence to show how she met her death.

Upton showed great grief at the loss of his wife and for some months led a very retired life. As there was some doubt about the cause of Mrs. Upton's death, the county police took the matter up, but they soon dropped it again and the interest of the public died away.

There was only one person whose interest was maintained; that was Mr. Fred Cradwicke, who resolved to devote himself to the task of discovering the truth if it were in any way possible to do so. But he kept his resolve to himself.

He made it his business to invite himself to Cradwicke Park for a few weeks, ostensibly to condole with his brother-in-law—who now owned the property by reason of his wife having died intestate. Cradwicke did not

suspect his brother-in-law, but he wanted to find out exactly how matters had stood with husband and wife, as that might have a bearing on the probability of suicide. But he could glean no further information than that given to the coroner. So he left the Park in order to make an investigation farther afield.

The question of robbery and murder combined was out of the question, seeing that nothing was taken from the body; it was therefore useless to look about for the probable thieves.

Altogether, the affair was a mystery that appeared to be hopeless of solution, but Fred Cradwicke felt that it was a duty on his part to discover the truth, and he made up his mind to devote a whole year, if necessary, to the fulfilment—or attempted fulfilment—of his task.

It is one of the odd things of this life that you may search for something for a long time in vain, and then, when you are convinced that nothing more can be done and are about to give up the search, a "final try," conducted probably in a half-hearted manner—results in success. Thus it was with Fred Cradwicke.

Only two weeks of the appointed period remained, and Fred Cradwicke found himself in a small village within five miles of Cradwicke Park. He was dispirited and hopeless, and was making his way to the Park with a view to staying there and resting for two or three days.

He found the inhabitants of this village in a state of mild excitement, due to the fact that a fair was being held in a field outside the village. Curiosity, and the lack of something better to do, took him in the direction of the fair.

It was evening, just after six o'clock, and the shows were "about to begin," for during the day there was no chance of business. Fred walked about aimlessly, noting the poor booths and the general meagreness of the whole thing; he was about to leave the field and continue his walk to the Park when he was attracted by some gaudily-coloured pictures hanging outside one of the booths.

These pictures informed the wondering rustics that Nalla Dora, the Great Female Snake-Charmer, had come amongst them to exhibit her wonderful powers over gigantic boa-constrictors and similar reptiles; they showed her in various positions with fearful snakes of extraordinary length and girth twining themselves round her arms, legs, waist and throat, with their heads poised ready to sting her, while she remained a model of calmness. A show of that description was well worth an admission fee of one penny, and the rustics readily parted with their money.

Fred smiled and turned away, but by this time a little more animation had been imparted to the fair and he was impelled to stay a little longer. A goodly number of people had arrived from various parts and the fun was beginning. Fred had always been a student of human nature and it pleased him to stand first here and then there in order to watch the small crowd. It began to grow dark and naphtha lamps were lighted outside the booths, which induced the villagers to remain longer and spend a few more pence. Fred was outside the booth of the snake-charmer when a man attached to the show announced the last performance for the day. Only about half-a-dozen persons went in, and Cradwicke resolved to go with them.

The exhibition of snake-charming offered no particular attraction to Cradwicke; he would have left the booth almost at the commencement but for the fact that he

occupied a front seat and did not wish to disturb the other spectators by pushing his way out. Owing to his position he was the last to get into the open, where he was surprised to find himself in the dark; all the shows had turned out their lights and the merry-makers were gone.

Not knowing exactly which way to go to get clear of the field, he tried to follow his late companions and find the opening in that way, but they seemed to have scurried off and he could only hear the occasional sound of a voice at some distance from him. There was no moon and the sky was cloudy, so that it was not an easy matter for him to find his way out.

He looked about him for a few seconds and then made a start in what he believed to be the proper direction, but he had not gone half-a-dozen yards when he brushed against a man who was coming towards him.

Fred was on the point of apologising when the other man uttered a brief "Beg pardon!" Fred never pronounced his apology, for the sound of that voice deprived him of speech. It was Richard Upton.

Fred walked forward for a few yards and then came to an abrupt stand. What was Upton doing there? He appeared to be going straight to the booth of the snake-charmer. Scarcely knowing what he was about, Fred deliberately faced about, so that he might be in exactly the same line of march, and walked back to the booth.

He found the door and pushed it open gently; there was a faint light from the lamp on the platform, and Fred, feeling something like a thief, peered about cautiously. He saw Nalla Dora and Richard Upton standing together on the platform.

There was some secret here which Fred resolved to penetrate. Slipping on his hands and knees, he made his way silently round the booth towards the platform. It was not a spacious place and he had to be careful. He kept his eyes and ears strained to catch every movement and every sound, but in spite of his vigilance he did not notice that another figure was keeping close to him.

"I sent for you because I intend to have an answer to this question—When will you redeem your promise?"

Those were the first words which reached the ears of Cradwicke as he crouched near the platform, and they were spoken by Nalla Dora, not in the strange accent which he had heard during the performance, but in clear English. This girl, as he had fancied, was no Hindoo; she was probably a gipsy of English birth.

"How can I marry you without arousing suspicion?" replied Upton. "In any case, you would not be received by the county people. It would——"

"It matters nothing to me what the county people may think, and it should matter nothing to you if you loved me as you pretended. We could go away—go abroad—and be happy." Nalla Dora spoke with the vehemence of rising passion.

Upton remained silent and the snake-charmer continued.

"I will not listen to your offer of money! I will share the wealth and position which I helped you to get into your own hands! You loved me once, and you left me for a woman with money. That woman is out of the way. You never loved her, and when you had her money you tired of her and would have married me had you been free. You are free now, but you have ceased to love me. But I claim my share!"

"Confound it!" exclaimed Upton, looking about him

uneasily. "Don't talk so loud! I tell you, it would be better for you to accept my offer."

"And leave you free to marry the other woman? You see, I know more than you think. Never!"

"Then you will get nothing!" said Upton in a tone of sullen determination. "You have no hold on me. If you tell the public that my wife nearly surprised us in the park when the show was outside our gates a year ago and that you caused that confounded serpent, which you are so fond of taking about with you, to sting her, you must incriminate yourself. What a fool I was to agree!"

Nalla Dora laughed scornfully.

"You call yourself a fool now, but you were ready enough to assist in regaining your freedom, and that before she had made a will, and you helped in making the scratch on her leg to obliterate the mark of the serpent. Listen, if you do not swear to do what I wish, you shall die as your wife did."

There was silence, followed by some angry whisperings which did not reach Cradwicke. Then he saw Upton catch her by the throat with his left hand, and the light fell on a gleaming object in Upton's right hand.

There was a scuffle, a cry that resembled a command from Nalla Dora, and as Cradwicke scrambled on to the platform he was horrified to see a monster serpent twine itself about the form of his brother-in-law. At the same moment Cradwicke was dragged from the platform and a heavy knee was placed on his chest.

"If you move a muscle I'll choke you!" hissed a voice which he recognised as that of the man who had done the shouting outside. "No man shall play with my sister!"

Fred lay there powerless, knowing the tragedy that was being enacted close to him. His eyes wandered to the platform in an effort to see what was going on, as though that might be some help to his wretched brother-in-law, but he could see nothing. He heard two or three gasping cries, and the sound of something being crushed, and then he fainted.

When Cradwicke came to himself he was lying in a dry ditch by the side of a road quite a mile from the field and he knew that some drug or anæsthetic had been administered to him, for it was noon. He staggered and stumbled along the road till he came to an inn, where he told part of what had happened. Upton's body was found at some distance in another direction.

The police did their best to trace Nalla Dora and the man who called himself her brother, but they never succeeded. She certainly never appeared again in the character of a snake charmer.

Cradwicke Hall came into the possession of a distant relative of Upton's. People wondered why Fred Cradwicke never attempted to get possession of the estate which bore his name, but he himself has declared more than once that he would sooner beg his bread than own Cradwicke Park.

DAISY GEORGE.

A CURATE preaching for a charitable institute (deaf and dumb), endeavoured to excite his audience to greater liberality than usual.

At the close of a flowing sentence, in which, without mentioning the name of the house, he praised the staff and the founders, he delivered himself as follows:

"I allude to an institution in our midst, our noble institution for the dem and duff—" (great confusion)—"the duff and dem institute, I mean!"

35 TEN-POUND MEN AND 1 TEN-POUND LADY CAPTURED.

Since last week one more Sealed Envelope has been claimed, the lucky captor being:

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£360 HAS NOW BEEN PAID AWAY,

and there are still a number of Sealed Envelopes awaiting claimants.

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is now on sale, and can be obtained from all newsagents for 1s. 4d., or direct from the SONG DEPARTMENT, Pearson's Buildings, Henrietta Street, London, W.C., for 1s. 6d. Postal Order (not stamps) post free.

PLAYED ON THE STAGE.

Two sketches have been written on the subject of the Ten-Pound Note Scheme, one lasting about half-an-hour and one fifteen minutes.

In No. 1 Sketch the cast consists of four actors and two actresses. In No. 2 Sketch the cast consists of two actors and one actress.

Any organisers of entertainments for Christmas, such as church bazaars or Christmas parties, or private theatricals, who wish to include either of these sketches in their attractions, should write to the TEN-POUND SKETCH DEPARTMENT, Pearson's Buildings, Henrietta Street, London, W.C.

Full particulars of the Scheme will be sent on application to Room 36, Pearson's Buildings, Henrietta Street, London, W.C.

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The Quest of the Karsi.

WHEN it was made known that Professor Hunter was married, everybody stared at everybody else in surprise; and when it was ascertained that the marriage was the result of a romantic adventure, everybody opened his eyes still wider.

What! Hunter, who was at least fifty, a learned professor, a traveller who seemed to care for nothing except Eastern languages and similar curiosities—a man who took no interest in women-kind unless it were the stone or wooden image of some half-forgotten goddess, or the history of a female deity in some ancient manuscript—Hunter married, Hunter in a love romance! Impossible!

But it was true; he himself confirmed the rumour in a few terse sentences: at the end of a letter on scientific subjects to his old friend, Professor Clayton.

The world wanted to know all about it and Clayton was besieged with inquiries; but he knew nothing of the circumstances. When asked to write to Hunter for details, he remarked that the latter would never give them by letter, he felt certain, and as he was going to Persia himself in a little while he thought it best to call on Hunter and obtain the information by word of mouth.

He did so, and two months later he sent home a long letter from Shiraz, where Hunter was residing for a time with his wife, a Persian lady. He said that Hunter had given permission for the facts to be made known, so that we need not scruple to show the letter to those who wished to learn the full story.

The narrative was given as nearly as possible in Hunter's own words, and ran as follows:

"The adventure really began in Bokhara where I made the acquaintance of an old Persian flower-dealer.

"I was on the look out for anything in the shape of very rare botanical specimens, and this old fellow had books and parchments containing descriptions and rough drawings of many plants which I have never come across in the whole course of my wanderings; musty old papers and volumes which looked as though they had not been opened for a score of years.

"Ha!" said the old fellow, who spoke English very well and did not take it kindly when I addressed him in his own tongue. "You are a great traveller, but I can show you more than you have seen in plant life. What do you think of this?"

"He pulled out a book composed of sheets of parch-

ment attached together and to a cover; they were full of Chinese characters and drawings of flowers. Turning rapidly over the leaves, he stopped at one and pointed to it with his forefinger. The drawing represented a species of orchid entirely unknown to the world; it resembled a human head with a cap, and it was called the Karsi.

"That plant is fictitious!" I exclaimed decisively.

"Nothing of the kind!" cried the old man just as energetically. "This volume contains the full history of the flower. It was discovered by an officer in the army of the great Timour the Tartar more than five centuries ago; he saw it on the brink of an ensanguined pool where the slaughter had been heaviest. It was taken away and cultivated by a sect which made a deity of the plant. It has been kept quite a secret ever since."

"H'm!" I grunted. "A likely story. Just as if the temples, or whatever they be, of this sect, could not be entered and the secret discovered. Where is this sect located?"

"The Russian Governor-General at Tashkend would give a considerable amount to anyone who could tell him!" was the reply. "The members of that sect keep their whereabouts a profound secret, and there is reason to believe that the world would be all the better if they were dispersed. That is all I can tell you."

"I took a tracing of the sketch in the Chinese volume and afterwards I made a drawing of the Karsi on card board and coloured it according to the description given in the book. Then I put it in my bag and forgot it for a few days.

"About three weeks later I was at Samarcand in company with an acquaintance who was, like myself, a traveller. We were talking of plants and I showed him the drawing of the Karsi. This incident occurred in the street, and I remember that we both stood still for a few moments while my friend scrutinised the sketch and listened to my account of it.

"Do you intend to make a search for it?" he asked me jestingly.

"I would, if I knew where on earth to look for it," I replied.

"He laughed and then the matter dropped. The rare orchid was brought to my mind again on the evening of the following day while I was seated in the little restau-

rant; I had finished a light meal, and was gazing meditatively into space, when a folded paper fluttered into my lap and brought me back to myself. Before picking up the paper I looked round to see who had thrown it there, and discovered near me a tall Hindoo with a very white beard.

"I had seen him two or three times already in Samarcand; he was an expert juggler. Catching my eye, he nodded as much as to say that it was he who had deposited the paper on my knees, and then he went rapidly from the restaurant.

"I took up the paper and found written on it a message which startled me and yet still more excited my curiosity concerning the Karsi.

"To seek the Karsi is to court destruction. Be warned by a friend!"

"I had but little sleep that night, for I felt that there was a basis of truth in what the old Persian had told me. I looked out for the juggler during the next day, but he was gone; so I resolved to speak to a wise old Mollah whom I had seen every day crossing the square on the way from the mosque.

"The old man had heard about the Karsi, but he could not tell me anything definite concerning the locality where the sect held worship, or even the name of the sect; but he gave me one piece of information which I considered of great importance. He told me that he had heard from a shepherd near the foot-hills of the Thian-Shan Mountains that a Hindoo had been found in a dying state at the foot of the mountain, and round his neck was a chain with a piece of gold on which was engraved a flower similar to that of which I spoke. The Hindoo had pointed upwards to the mountain, but had died before he had been able to utter a word.

"That decided me, and accompanied by two armed Armenians, I set out for the Thian-Shan Mountains and interviewed the shepherd. He confirmed what the Mollah had told me.

"I allowed two days to elapse and then I began my survey of the mountain for some trace of the whereabouts of the strange sect, for I was firmly of the opinion that somewhere in the mountain-range I should find the home of the Karsi. The presence of the Hindoo with the golden token established the fact beyond a doubt in my mind.

"We spent a week in wearying toilings up the sides of the mountains, but we were baffled every time; after struggling up a path which only a mule could climb with anything approaching to ease, we would find that it ended in a deep fissure or in a perpendicular wall of mountain.

"On the eighth day we came to a similar abrupt termination to the path we were ascending—that is, to a wall of rock; but this time I discovered proof that certain things had been hauled up this wall and I felt exultant.

"I think we are upon the track at last," I said to my two companions. "We must see what is on the other side."

"The wall was about fifty feet high, and I scaled it by cutting holes for my feet and hands. Once seated astride the wall, I lowered a line which enabled my less athletic companions to reach the top. I secured the line and let it down on the other side so as to form a means of getting back again.

"We appeared to be looking into the mouth of an extinct crater about two hundred feet in diameter; a well-defined path led downwards until it was lost in the blackness. Down this path we all three went with grim determination.

"When we had gone some few yards into the darkness, we found a tunnel on our right; we entered this, the two Armenians going just in front. When we were well inside, I struck a match and lighted a taper, which I fixed in a crack in the wall; it did not give much light, but at least it was something bright in the darkness and served to make us feel safer.

"How delusive that idea of safety was; we had not gone half-a-dozen yards further when a figure dashed out from somewhere upon the two Armenians; I heard a cry, and I knew by the sound that they had been pushed into some awful pit. Ere I had time to think more, the figure was upon me and I was engaged in a death struggle with some powerful creature.

"I am not a young man but I am still blessed with a large amount of physical strength and my assailant had his work cut out to master me. He did his best to drag me forward, and in spite of my struggles he managed to pull me slowly towards the spot where my two men had disappeared. I was beginning to think that I should be forced to follow them, when he tripped and fell heavily on his back; he received my full weight on his chest and was rendered breathless and strengthless for the time being. Before he could recover, I had seized my opportunity and had him gagged and bound.

"I fetched the taper and had a look at him, with the result that I uttered an exclamation of surprise. It was the juggler, but without the beard, and round his neck was a chain with a golden token bearing a representation of the Karsi!

"I thought you were a friend?" I asked him somewhat ironically. "It looks like it."

"By the light of the taper I could see an expression in his eyes which induced me to remove his gag. I had my hands ready, notwithstanding, for I was not quite sure of him, but he spoke in a low voice and told me briefly that he was indeed anxious to be my friend.

"You are seeking the Karsi," he said, "and that means destruction to you unless you are careful."

"Then he explained that he was the unwilling slave of this strange sect and would gladly be free, but he feared that they would compass his death if he left them. He had seen me show the drawing to my acquaintance, and determined to warn me. Finding that he was unable to dissuade me, he expressed his intentions to help me. As I showed some surprise at his conduct, he informed me that I had befriended his brother some years ago and he was willing to repay the debt of gratitude.

"Acting on his directions, I made my way through the door by which he had entered the tunnel and, after traversing other passages, I suddenly emerged in the open—in a valley of pine trees with a dark stream running through it and forming a moat to what seemed a fortified city on the opposite bank. For there rose a wall to a height of sixty feet, and above this wall I could see palm trees, domes and minarets. This must be the home of the Karsi and the strange sect that worship it! I must see more of it!

"Back I went to Keshub and explained to him what I wanted. He shook his head, but agreed to help me.

"Go at midnight," he said, "and toss this ring over the wall. Ashkaba will find it and will drop a rope from the palm tree. You will climb into the tree and there you will be able to see much when the day dawns. You can only go at night, because then the stream is dried up."

"He would not accompany me, saying that it was better for him to keep guard. So I waited impatiently for midnight and then went on my mission.

"I found the bed of the stream dry, as Keshub had said. I threw the ring over the wall and after a few moments I heard a rope dangling against it. It was knotted and I had no difficulty in reaching the top of the palm tree from which it depended.

"How can I describe all the wonders which met my gaze when daylight came? I saw streets with beautiful houses and lovely plants full of song birds; people of Mongolian type in fantastic dress. I saw processions wending their way through the streets which all converged to a common centre where stood a magnificent temple. I was lost in wonder and more than once nearly betrayed myself.

"At midday there was a special procession, in the centre of which was a sumptuous litter. On it reclined a Persian woman, young and of surpassing beauty, the like of whom has never met my gaze; I followed her eagerly with my eyes and I groaned in spirit when she passed from view.

"Yes, I who have never felt any passion for a woman was now consumed by love for one whom I had only seen for a short time and at a distance! But it was enough, and the appearance of that divine face and figure was burnt on my brain.

"I do not know how I passed the remaining hours, but when it was dark enough I slipped down the rope and crossed the stream, which was knee-deep—I could not wait until midnight. When Keshub saw me, he started in dismay and asked how I dared venture from my hiding-place at so early an hour.

"What are they doing there with that young Persian?" I demanded without replying to his question.

"He would not answer until I had partaken of food, when he told me that it was the creed of the sect to sacrifice human beings to the Karsi. The emissaries of the sect were sent far and near to entice the young and beautiful to their city under various pretexts, but when the dupes reached their destination they were, after a brief measure of homage and enchantment, sacrificed to the Karsi.

"Do you mean to say that the lovely woman I saw to-day is to be killed?" I gasped in horror. "How?"

"They will take her in a grand procession to the temple at noon to-morrow," replied Keshub with a half-shiver. "When inside, she will be taken into a vault and placed on a stone at full length, under the belief that some new delight is in preparation; but the long arms of Karsi will close about her form and drain the blood from her body."

"Horrible!"

"Keshub, in reply to further inquiries, said that the vault would be absolutely dark and that the woman's figure would be obscured by a thick black veil and a mantle.

"I must save her!" I said in a decided tone. "You must help me."

"But how can you do it?" asked Keshub anxiously. "It is impossible and you will lose your life in the attempt."

"I did not answer, for I was revolving in my mind various plans for saving the Persian. Suddenly I jumped to my feet.

"I have it!" I exclaimed. "You and Ashkaba must help me."

"From my bag I took some pellets which were made of a poison of the most virulent kind and dissolved them in water, making a liquid with which I saturated my clothing and anointed my skin.

"The Persian is tall and will be concealed by a veil,"

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I said meaningly. 'I must take her place. I am saturated with a poison that would kill half the people in that city if they each took only a small dose. Do you understand?'

"At midnight both Keshub and I scaled the wall into the palm tree and thence we descended into the city. Keshub explained to Ashkaba what I intended to do, and together we made our way stealthily to the house occupied by the lovely victim.

"Ashkaba acquainted her with the doom intended for her and with my plan for saving her; it is needless to say that she nearly fainted when she learnt that she had been duped, but notwithstanding the horror of it, she declined at first to permit me to take her place in the procession, and it was not until she had been repeatedly assured that I had taken proper precautions that she consented.

"It wanted one hour to midday when the procession stopped in front of the house of Naski. Instead of the proposed victim, it was I who—enveloped in a veil and a mantle—stepped forth and took the seat in the litter.

"I will not stop to describe my feelings during the march to the temple; I saw nothing of what was going on, for I was absorbed in what might happen when I was conducted into the vault.

"I dimly remember some sort of formality when I reached the temple, but my faulties began to awaken only when I was descending the steps under the guidance of the priest.

"I could not see whither I was going, for I was in total darkness. When we reached the floor of the vault, I was led along it for a few yards and then bidden to lie flat on a stone which I could feel with my foot, and await the pleasures of paradise.

"As I lay there I was divided in opinion concerning the course I should take. I might leave the stone and grope my way up the stairs, trusting to luck for a chance to escape; before they could discover that their victim had eluded them, I might get away with Naski. But then the Karsi would still live to drink of human blood. On the other hand, if I could kill the dreadful plant, I should save many lives even though I might

lose my own. In the end I resolved to go through the ordeal.

"My deliberation was brief, but I had only just arrived at a decision when I felt something gripping me in different parts of the body. I covered my face and neck with my arms in order to protect them as far as possible and then waited in awful suspense.

"Tighter and tighter the horrible things compressed my body; one cord or tentacle had such a tight grip of my left leg that I feared it would be broken, while another twisted itself round my bare wrist. The pain was as great as the mental agony; I feared that my plan had failed and that my end had come, when the tentacles began to loosen. I breathed again and waited, yet still wondering whether the poison had taken effect upon the plant. Some minutes passed ere I could be quite sure, and then with my free arm and hand I groped for my knife and cut myself free.

"The Karsi was dead; so far I had been successful, but I now had to get clear of the temple and the city. I had reached the foot of the stairs when the door at the top was thrown open and a flood of light revealed me to the priest who stood in the doorway, scimitar in hand.

"With a howl of rage he leapt down the steps. I quickly stepped aside and struck him a heavy blow as he reached the bottom, felling him senseless. Then I bounded up the steps and through the door, which I closed behind me.

"Cries of astonishment and fear arose as I walked through the street and the people shrank from me, which was fortunate. It was also lucky that Keshub had kept near the temple, for I might have chosen the wrong street and so upset my scheme. He came to my side, brandishing a scimitar, and bade me run before the people recovered from their amazement.

"We ran as hard as we could, cutting down the few who tried to bar our way, and reached the house of Naski in safety. Here we found the lovely Persian and the Hindoo woman waiting, and without a moment's delay we were off to the palm tree.

"Over the wall and across the black stream on a raft prepared by Keshub; and just as we reached the opposite bank we heard the loud howls of vengeance uttered by the sect that worshipped the Karsi.

"We sped along through the tunnels, placing such obstacles as we could in the path of probable pursuers. As we neared the spot where the two Armenians had disappeared, we heard a rumbling, which made Keshub hurry us along at a still greater speed.

"'It is the earthquake!' cried the Hindoo.

"Across the mouth of the crater we sped, dreading every second that we should be swallowed up. We could hear the crash of buildings and the shrieks of terror even at that distance. Over the outer wall of rocks and down the mountain side we stumbled, and rested not until we reached the dwelling of the shepherd.

"By the time we reached Shiraz it had become clear to me that I could not live without Naski, and on questioning her I found that she was of the same opinion regarding myself."

G. A. DRAY.



"I felt something gripping me in different parts of the body."

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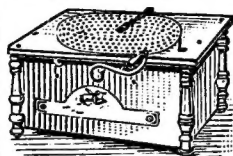
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If no lists of absolutely correct solutions are sent in, the first prize will be awarded to the competitor whose attempt is first dealt with showing the fewest mistakes.

Each week we shall award, in addition to the above, either ten of our gold-plated pencil-cases or ten popular novels, to be distributed amongst the competitors whose attempts are absolutely correct and have failed to win the first prize, or, if no complete lists of correct solutions are received, to those whose attempts show the fewest mistakes.

Write all your solutions on one sheet of paper, putting the number against each. Post the batch in an envelope marked "Brain Gymnasium," to reach the Editor, **SHORT STORIES**, 18 Henrietta Street, Covent Garden, W.C., by first post on Monday, December 3rd, 1900.

Readers are invited to submit puzzles, acrostics, conundrums, word-squares, etc., for publication on this page. A gold-plated pencil-case will be given to each reader whose attempts are used. All attempts must be vouched for as original, and, of course, it is distinctly understood that the sender of a puzzle must neither compete in the competition nor divulge to anyone the solution. Any reader found infringing this rule will be severely dealt with.

No. 247.

THOUGH in stature the smallest, I blush to confess
That by increasing my length you make me still less.
What am I?

No. 248:

THE following letters, when re-arranged, will give a well-known proverb:

A B C E H H I K L M N O O O O O P R S S T T T Y.

No. 249.

MY SECOND by my FIRST is worn;
Of my FIRST'S life, my WHOLE'S a term.

No. 250.

I AM a double comfort to the poor, but I never visit the rich; I dwell in every town in the world, but never in a village; I assist the robber as well as the honest; I live in a house, and sit on the floor, but never on a chair; I assist the corn to grow, but never the grass; now, if you have not yet found me out, but wish to see me, you will not have to look beyond the door for me.

No. 251.

FROM equivalents of the following form a word-square, the diagonals of which will give the names of two of the most important commercial rivers in the world.

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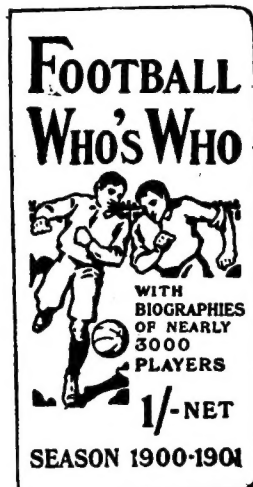
No. 252.

THE first you must take is the name of a man;
Next the name of an implement find if you can;
Then a part of your body, not far from your head,
And also a metal (but I do not mean lead).
The next is an article used by housewives,
Then the leaves of a plant which mothers do prize.
The FINALS of these should backwards be read—
But with the INITIALS begin at the head;
And if they together be uttered by you,
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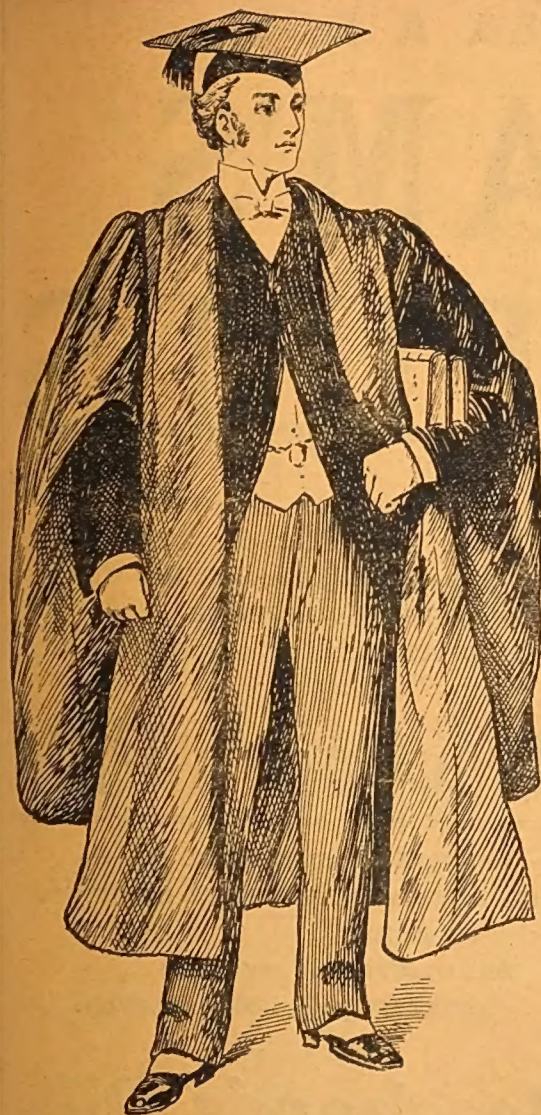
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